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**COMPAÑERAS:  
SYSTEMATISATION OF EXPERIENCES  
WITH ADULT LITERACY FACILITATORS  
IN GUATEMALA**

Marta Paluch

Submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy (Education)

University of Sussex

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:.....

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## SUMMARY

This study explores how a small group of adult literacy facilitators (ALFs) working on a pilot literacy project in a municipality in the Western Highlands of Guatemala, develop their practice. Although many reports have discussed the problems of adult literacy work in the Global South and the shortcomings of available training, very little research has been carried out directly with ALFs, examining the processes through which they develop their educational practice.

The thesis reports on a pilot programme which took a dialogic approach inspired by the work of Paulo Freire and with an emphasis on context, meaning and social practice drawn from New Literacy Studies. Learning activities focussed on personal expression and writing as the communication of meaning. Texts for reading were produced from participant writing. The ALFs were trained and supported in implementing the new programme.

The research uses Systematisation of Experiences, a Latin American methodology linked to popular education which involves project participants in a collective process of reflection on their experiences, leading to the generation of new knowledge both of the internal dynamics of the programme and the work of the project in relation to the wider context. Bourdieu's concepts of *field*, *habitus*, *capital* and *doxa* are used to analyse the socio-political setting in which the pilot programme was situated, observing the positions of the research participants within the *field* of adult literacy in Guatemala. ALFs operate at the margins of the *field*, subjected to the power structure of the national literacy programme while having no influence on decisions affecting their work.

The thesis traces the trajectories of the individual ALFs through the pilot programme and reports on the collaborative work which enabled the growth of trust and a joint sense of purpose. The narrative form attempts to present the multiple voices of participants in dialogue, emphasising the collective processes of knowledge generation. In spite of the difficulties of working with a radically different approach, ALFs supported each other to make important changes in their practice. They observed how participants in their groups responded to the pilot activities and began to question the traditional methods endorsed by the organisation they worked for. Offered the space to design and develop new activities, they demonstrated the ability to make innovative interventions.

However, the ALFs felt unsupported by the national adult literacy programme they work for, which has no policy or strategy to develop a professional approach to adult literacy by investing in the training and retention of ALFs. The thesis concludes with the ALFs' views of how the organisation is failing them and what is needed to improve the provision.

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# 1. Roots and Routes

## Introduction

This thesis reports on participatory research with Adult Literacy Facilitators (ALFs) in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. My interaction with the ALFs was shaped by the experiences, practices and values, which I brought to the work. Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) points out that in reflexive research, it is not enough to identify the ethnicity and gender of the researcher but important to analyse how they are positioned in the world of cultural production.

In this first chapter I try to identify those aspects of my biography which were most influential in the research process. I also trace the experiences and contexts that have produced the educational practice from which I approached the work that led to this thesis. I start the chapter with a question of identity and describe some of the experiences that shaped it. I recall my schooling and studies and my entry into the field of adult education at the time when the student publishing movement was at its peak. I trace my professional development in different contexts and the theoretical understandings that emerged in the process. Finally, I explain how I came to work in Guatemala and what I am working towards in this thesis.

## Identity

The Catechism of the Polish Child (Appendix:1) was written by the children's poet Władysław Bełza, in 1900, during the years when Poland was partitioned between Russia, Prussia and Austria. Nearly ten years after the end of the Second World War, I was learning it as a child living in London. The poem had been banned in Poland in 1951 and removed from all libraries. Perhaps that's why Polish refugees adopted it and taught it to their children.

My parents were both active in the London Polish community. My father, who had been appointed a district judge in Poland, worked as a solicitors' clerk and studied English law at evening classes. He acted as legal adviser to a number of Polish organisations and also offered free advice to individuals. My mother was active in *Harcerstwo* (Polish scouting movement), leading summer camps and holding varied leadership positions in the hierarchy of the organisation. I am one of seven sisters and my mother, who grew up in Western Ukraine and learned the spontaneous harmonies

of the region, taught us to sing. Our little choir appeared at many Polish events and we were well known in the community.

I did not speak English when I started school and there were often misunderstandings at the beginning and many instances of limited vocabulary, but eventually I became fluent in the language. I didn't like school much. I enjoyed problem solving activities, working things out for myself and learning to read and write fitted with this. I also enjoyed sports and art activities. But endless grammar exercises and trying to remember facts from radio programmes was tedious. Sitting still was never easy and being told not to fidget still echoes in my brain.

Passing the 11+ and going to a grammar school meant more of the tedious aspects of education and less of what I enjoyed. There were a few teachers who briefly inspired me, but they didn't stay long at the school. One year I was in hospital for a week just before exams and this gave me the time to study and prepare. On the basis of this independent learning, I did well in the exams, but the daily discipline of sitting at desks, following a strict timetable, constantly under the control of others was excruciating and my performance went downhill until I brought home a report saying that my place was 23rd out of 32 in the class.

Being Polish was a central part of my identity through to my late teens. But it developed from the nationalism of the catechism of the Polish child to something more complex as I lived through a British education, engaged with classmates (mainly Irish) noted that my experiences of English Catholicism were more progressive and meaningful than the Polish traditions and realised that the values I was raised with, were strongly conservative.

In her analysis of the Chicana/mestiza identity, Gloria Anzaldúa (2012:38) stresses the power of the culture that is inherited:

Culture forms our beliefs. We perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, pre-defined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture.

She carries this identity, like the shell of a turtle, however far she may be from her geographical home. But she also gives an account of her struggles against the repressive aspects of this culture, particularly in relation to women, and shows how in breaking our culture's rules, we fear that the culture will reject us. She describes the process as living with "cultural collision" (p.101), which leads to a tolerance for

ambiguity and contradictions, a plural personality. How can we separate the inherited, the acquired and the imposed? she asks.

In contrast, Stuart Hall (1996:2) understands identification in discursive terms. It is "a construction, a process never completed – always 'in process'." He argues that it can be over-determined by certain discourses, as my Polish identity was over-determined in my childhood through the discourses of nationalism and political exile. Identity is "not the stable core of the self" but "conditional, lodged in contingency" (p.3). Hall argues that the process of identification uses "the resources of history, language and culture," but is less about 'roots' than 'routes', "not who we are but what we might become" (p.4).

Bourdieu (2007:100) writing about the experience of coming from a 'modest' (p.103) background and achieving academic success posits the concept of a cleft habitus.

This dual experience could only compound the durable effect of a very strong discrepancy between high academic consecration and low social origins, in other words a *cleft habitus*, inhabited by tensions and contradictions.

And he suggests that this cleft habitus influenced his academic work, particularly in "a desire to explore unknown social milieu" (p.66):

But this cleft habitus, the product of a 'conciliation of contraries', is perhaps more clearly manifested in the particular style of my research, the type of objects that interest me, and the ways in which I approach them (p.103).

I will return to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* in later chapters.

While these three writers analyse identity from situated experiences very different to my own, I find in their analysis some explanation of my own struggles with identity. Something of the particular expression of Polish culture that I was raised in remains with me, while I reject other aspects. The idea of a cleft habitus is another way of understanding my experience of living at the centre of the London Polish community while feeling an outsider in British society. This 'conciliation of contraries' is perhaps what has driven my ongoing interest in other cultures and transcultural communication. It has led me to live in different countries, learn new languages and choose to work with people who like myself, weave their lives across cultures and languages.

I was in Colombia in 1973, when the Popular Unity government in Chile, under the presidency of Salvador Allende, was overthrown in a bloody coup led by General

Pinochet, with the backing of the CIA. When I returned to the UK, I got involved in the Chile Solidarity Campaign and also did voluntary work with refugees. Although the refugees came with a very different political position from my parents, I observed many parallels in their experience of exile: the profound sense of loss, the yearning for the homeland, the dream of return, the importance of raising their children (just as I had been raised) knowing the language and participating in cultural practices and political events, maintaining the sense of community and identity. In this realisation of a shared experience, I moved away from a discourse of nationalism to one of solidarity. In Hall's terms, a route taken, a process of becoming.

## **Studies**

Interested in why and how people become who they are, I studied Social Psychology but rather than exploring origins of actions or processes of change the course focussed on describing behaviour. Behaviourism was influential at the time and our studies of the psychology of learning diminished this complex process to the language of stimulus, response and reinforcement (Borger & Seaborne, 1966). Skinner was invited to speak at our university and the hall was packed, though many came to oppose him. Alienated by the positivism and behaviourism of the course, I was a poor student again, uninspired by what I had chosen to study, more interested in feminism and Latin American politics than psychological experiments which taught me nothing that I valued.

It was Chilean refugees who introduced me to the ideas of Paulo Freire. I joined a study group that was researching the situation of refugees learning English, with the intention of developing an approach that was more appropriate to the political situation of the refugees than the teaching of polite requests that one of the group members complained of. Through participating in this group, I became aware of the dialogic and consciousness-raising aspects of Freire's work. I went on to do a Certificate of Education in post-compulsory education, specialising in literacy and numeracy. In this context, I was able to deepen my knowledge of Freire's thinking (1970, 1996a) and also discovered the work of John Dewey (1966, 1997). I was taken with Dewey's ideas on how shaping experiences that would lead to learning was the central role of the educator. His views on the need to democratise schooling and trust teachers also spoke to me.

I did my teaching practice at a Further Education (FE) College with groups of young people who had left school without qualifications and were working to improve their English and Mathematics. What I saw in the classes I was sent to observe, was very far from the experience-led or awareness-raising methods I imagined. Mathematics lessons consisted of explanations and worksheets; English classes, while a little more varied, were uninspiring and the young people demonstrated their lack of interest through resistance to instructions. I was disappointed and disillusioned. In my own teaching, I tried to introduce experiential activities and discussion, but my attempts did not achieve the results I hoped for. I left with many questions about the reality of what counted as education, compared to the idealism of my intentions, and felt unable to go into teaching.

## **Student Publishing Movement**

Instead I got a job in a radical education bookshop where I discovered the work of John Holt (1987), who described the damaging impact of school practices on the learning and independence of children, which resonated with my own experience of schooling. I was also impressed by Ivan Illich's (1976) indictment of the institution of education as a form of social control with its rigid forms, hidden curriculum and lack of recognition that the majority of learning takes place outside schools. Although school culture has changed since my childhood, I retain a critical view of the value of schooling as education. Reading about the Education for All (WEF, 2000) targets or the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, n.d.) with their focus on access to schooling, I find myself questioning what exactly is being offered to those children who are being encouraged into classrooms.

The bookshop stocked publications of the Worker Writers' movement and I read these with great interest. The movement had started in the 1960s as an alliance between working class writers wanting to express their experiences and frustrations, and middle-class radicals who supported them (Hayler & Thomson, 1995; Woodin, 2005). Themes that appeared in the writing included childhood, street life, home life and relationships, school, work, unemployment, solidarity, resilience, relations with or resistance to authorities, union work and political activity, experiences of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. A common feature was the appearance of non-standard forms of English. This work allowed for the democratisation and demystification of publishing and the publications represented experiences that readers were likely to recognise (Gregory, 1991).

The community publishing projects that produced the worker writers' books started to publish writing by literacy students in the 1970s. Adult literacy work was developed by voluntary sector organisations, sometimes with links to the Worker Writers' movement. Centerprise in East London was a community publishing project, bookshop and adult education centre. Sue Shrapnel Gardener, the co-ordinator of the centre was instrumental in setting up the literacy students' paper, *Write First Time*, and later became its first Writing Development Worker. The paper was both a publication of student writing and a resource for literacy classes.

[Write First Time] was designed both as a reading resource and to indicate a place for writing as part of literacy learning and, in particular, writing of an expressive or argumentative kind rather than that of the functional curriculum (Gardener, 1991, p. 168)

I started to volunteer in an adult literacy class and attended a weekly discussion group on Language, Literacy and Politics led by Shrapnel Gardener. The approach to adult literacy, which I learned more about through the group had links to Freire's ideas.

[this approach] sees the student as a person wronged and deprived, not as a backward person. It sees the teacher's job as [...] the disturbance and creation of consciousness [...] links should be sought with workers' organizations. [...] It needs to find a way of creating among students solidarity, mutual help, and the shedding of self-reproach and shame (Shrapnel Gardner 1974, cited in Woodin, 2005 p.359).

Gardener (1991) argued that introducing expressive writing in literacy classes, moved students beyond seeing themselves as consumers of text produced by others. Working with spoken language recognises students' ability to generate meaning and communicate it. There are two competing demands for new writers: producing text that expresses meaning and doing so 'correctly', according to the norms of the dominant dialect and form. Many students expressed frustration at not being able to put their ideas in writing because of fears of incorrect spelling. Validation through feedback, the value of a readership whether in the literacy group or beyond, and encouragement were elements that supported development.

One student expressed it in this way:

I think it is very important that a student sees something of their writing in print. I got a wonderful feeling when I saw it, a feeling that I could never explain. I feel as if people over there in other parts of Manchester or over there in other parts of the country need to see these things, need to see my work in print say "Oh, if he can do it, I can do it (Gatehouse, 1984, p.6, cited in Hamilton et al.).



This was an exciting time to become involved in adult literacy and adult education. It was far removed from my experiences at the FE college. Moving from volunteering to leading groups myself, I worked with these ideas of student control over learning and aims of consciousness-raising. Publishing student writing in various simple formats has remained an important part of my educational practice and was a central aspect of my work in Guatemala.

Jane Mace (1992) notes that over time, many adult literacy tutors moved from an initial position of activism to a more critical and reflective position. Drawing on the work of Brian Street (1984), Mace argues that literacy education should offer a repertoire of purposes and stresses the need for dialogue and inquiry in literacy work. Teachers move between research and instruction. They cannot predict or control the effect of courses. Participants' outside lives and the communities they participate in have a major impact on what they gain from a course. Through dialogue, tutors work to support students to develop the literacy practices they request. Questions come up as writing happens and it is at this point that instruction is appropriate. Other writers have also argued against the binary of expressive and formal writing and suggest that expressive writing can be combined with work that can be assessed to measure progress (Fitzpatrick, 1995; Wallis, 1995). These were ideas that over time I assimilated into my teaching.

Student publishing in England faded during the late 1980s, undermined by a hostile government and cuts in funding. Community organisations were weakened, adult literacy classes became more formalised and there was a backlash against expressive writing. In the 1990s, Adult Basic Education moved towards Basic Skills Training. The Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 made funding available only to accredited courses, based on functional competencies, attacking the agency of both students and tutors. Democratic spaces in adult education were being lost (Wallis, 1995; Woodin, 2007; Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2016).

### **Understanding my work as a Bourdieusian Field**

During the 1980s I spent three years in Turkey, working as an English language teacher, and learning Turkish. As I integrated into social and cultural aspects of life in Turkey, I added another dimension to my fractured identity. In trying to make sense of the new experiences, I turned to anthropology, enrolling on an MA course at Goldsmiths, as a part-time student. At the same time, I worked with minority linguistic

communities, first as an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tutor in adult education, then setting up a community health interpreting service and finally back in adult education co-ordinating a refugee project. I also did voluntary work with a Kurdish community organisation.

In working for the health interpreting service, I found myself having to negotiate the complex structures of a large organisation, for the first time. Explaining and promoting the service to a meeting of senior nurses was a daunting experience. Trying to set up procedures that made the service run more smoothly needed the support of influential people within the health service as well as community organisations. In making a complaint about the racist comments of a consultant obstetrician, I was backed by a health authority member.

When I encountered Bourdieu's concept of *field*, I understood it in terms of these experiences. The field is a place of conflict where different kinds of *capital* are manipulated by players to improve their position. The *habitus*, as we have already seen in the quotations from Bourdieu above, relates to identity and is the system of 'dispositions' that make up the approach players bring to the conflict (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). My capital was limited, and my habitus not well developed for this context. But working through networks with like-minded people, at the margins, we were able to offer small acts of support to the users of our service. Some were undocumented migrants and through informal networks we found sympathetic GPs who would register them without asking questions. The training that we designed for the interpreters, resisted discourses of the impartiality of the interpreter, and stressed the importance of supporting the client, in an unequal power relationship with health workers.

Field manipulations were even more evident when I worked for the refugee project. This was the time when FE colleges were moving away from local authority control and received their funding from central government through the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The adult education service where I was initially placed was incorporated into a new institution, which included two FE colleges and a Sixth Form Centre. Managers were manoeuvring for position within the new institution. With the changed funding regimes, accountants took charge of decisions, previously made by educators, on how programmes should be organised in terms of length, numbers of students, and weekly contact hours, in order to maximise funding. Finding Bourdieu's

concepts a powerful tool for understanding these events, I have used his theoretical framework in my research to analyse the field of adult literacy in Guatemala. This is presented in Chapter 3.

The refugee project offered short intensive ESOL courses and education advice that would lead the students on to further study or job-related training. Many of the refugee students had strong political views and we all learned from the discussions we held. We included expressive and argumentative writing as part of the programme, which resulted in a range of texts on political and social issues as well as personal stories of persecution and escape.

While working with migrants and refugees, I became increasingly aware of the racist actions and attitudes both blatant and subtle that people faced, which as a white ethnic minority person I had not experienced. In my anthropology MA dissertation, I analysed the representation of refugees in the British press in the run up to the first Asylum Bill in 1991, when the then Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker, launched the term “bogus refugee”. The question of how migrants, refugees, people of colour or linguistic minorities are represented and struggles for equality have remained an integral part of my political activism and professional practice and raised ethical issues in my research which I explore further in Chapter 4.

## **Collaborative Professional Practice**

In 2002 I joined the Outreach team at Tower Hamlets College (THC) which worked in ESOL, Literacy and Numeracy. The team was a powerful example of a community of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) present learning as social practice and in analysing ethnographic studies of how apprentices learn and become integrated into their occupations, they note that newcomers start at the periphery of a community of practice and through a process of participation, begin to absorb and be absorbed into the culture of practice. Accepting the values of the community, they develop their identity, learning more through interaction with other apprentices than from their masters or teachers.

In the team to which I was a newcomer, there was a strong ethic of commitment to the communities we worked with and of developing quality provision through innovative methods and sharing of ideas and materials. The context of the college, which allocated generous time for staff development, and a manager who was both demanding and determined to bring resources to the programme, enabled strong

morale. The team was stable so that new members were always a minority and were soon drawn into the collective culture of the team. Just as Lave & Wenger describe, I started with legitimate peripheral participation and from there moved towards the core of the community of practice. Within the field of Further Education, where conflicting approaches and manoeuvring for position were evident, there existed the possibility of creating democratic spaces of collaboration and solidarity.

This was the time of the 'Skills for Life' initiative introduced in response to the Moser Report (1999) which, using a skills deficit discourse, cited seven million people as being in need of adult literacy, numeracy or ESOL provision. This was the first major government initiative in the area since the 1970s and it took a functional skills approach. Hillier (2009) argues that in the implementation of policy there are constant tensions and challenges that we need to negotiate. Practitioners can adopt or subvert policies according to their ability and determination to take action.

The Skills for Life programme introduced a core curriculum for literacy adapted from the recently implemented schools' curriculum. However, ESOL practitioners organised against the imposition of this curriculum through the National Association for Teachers of English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA) and the ESOL curriculum was eventually designed by practitioners from the London Language and Literacy Unit. As Hillier (2009:545) argues:

This is an example of a successful policy intervention by activists to safeguard the interests of ESOL learners in the first nationally funded basic skills framework (Hillier, 2009:545).

The new ESOL curriculum was a list of competencies at different levels with suggested integrated activities for teaching them. We were expected to incorporate these competencies into our schemes of work, our lesson objectives and our students' individual learning plans. And while we did this, it was still clear to me that we cannot really predict and control what is learned. We are often not aware of what students bring to their learning from their lives outside the classroom and the communities they form a part of. We may try to evidence and check off the learning objectives but in doing this, we ignore the complexity of the learning process and the students' agency (Mace, 1992).

In the Outreach team, we debated and analysed the new initiatives. Some were welcomed, others needed careful adaptation, and a few were strongly resisted. Of course, there were differences in positions among us, but it was the dynamic process

of the situation, the dialogues, actions and solidarity which enabled us all to learn and develop our practice. As Avalos (2011) points out in her review of teacher education, co-learning is an essential aspect of teacher development and this question of collaborative learning and collective construction of knowledge is fundamental to my research.

One of my classes was a literacy group for service users at a mental health charity. In response to reading a short extract from Nelson Mandela's (1994) autobiography, where he describes his time in prison, the group wrote their own autobiographical pieces, spontaneously including their experiences of mental illness. In keeping with the ideas of the student publishing movement, we produced a booklet with these and other texts written during the course. Use of laptops was also offered as part of the programme and the students designed their own pages. We invited the Mayor of Tower Hamlets to the presentation of the booklet. I will not attempt to put a name to the feelings of the students at this event, but for me it remains as a powerful memory of achievement. As Merryfield (2006:158) points out:

Learning does change lives, but we cannot predict how or plan for it. We only know it after the event.

I could not have planned such an outcome in advance; it emerged from the relationships in the group and the readiness of the students to share their experiences. In spite of the diminishing democratic spaces (Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2016) it was still possible in adult education to work in response to situations arising from dialogues with learners.

## **Work and Research in Guatemala**

Retirement offered freedom from the demands and stresses of paid work and the possibility of doing something which was valuable in my terms, not on the basis of government discourses. Ever since reading Freire, I had dreamed of working in adult literacy in Latin America. I looked for voluntary work and managed to get a placement with the Comité Nacional de Alfabetización (CONALFA), the national adult literacy programme in Guatemala. I worked with a municipal adult literacy programme in the Western Highlands, a region with a majority indigenous Maya population. The literacy programme was offered in Spanish as, in the town where I was based, many people no longer spoke the Mayan languages.

Starting by observing classes, I began to consider what aspects of my own educational practice might be relevant to this context. Between 2011 and 2015 I worked collaboratively with 23 adult literacy facilitators (ALFs) and made over 100 class visits. During these visits, I tried out different activities, discussing them with the ALFs, adapting them on the basis of the response, building a repertoire of learning activities that engaged the participants in reading and writing. Eventually these activities were developed into a literacy programme with the Municipal Literacy Co-ordinator and offered as a pilot project in 2016. The progress of this pilot literacy programme is the subject of this thesis.

In working with the ALFs and their groups, discussing the work with them, I became aware of their own expectations and how the context in which they worked shaped their educational practice. I wanted to know more of their own biographies and the values that they brought to their work, how they understood their role as ALFs, what kind of training they found useful and how they engaged with new ideas. I had addressed some of these questions in an MA dissertation (Paluch, 2012) and have developed them further in my doctoral work. The research questions, as they have evolved through the research process, are set out in detail in Chapter 4.

I approach my research from the position of practitioner (Schön, 1992; 1995). Schön distinguishes between the 'high ground' of academic knowledge and the 'swamp' of practice-based knowledge and describes how practitioners often find themselves alienated by academic discourse and lose a sense of their own competence. Rigour is demanded by the academic institution while relevance is demanded in practice, where "problems are messy and confusing and incapable of technical solution" but they are "of greatest human concern" (1995:28).

In the research with the adult literacy programme, I acted both as a practitioner: training and supporting the ALFs who were working on the pilot project, and as researcher: observing and analysing the processes of learning of the literacy participants and the ALFs, and my own learning, adapting the training and support as the project developed. We learned together through the process and this thesis explores what was learned and how. I approach learning as social practice: learning is social, situated in a particular structure and context; it is about changing practice. Lave (2012:166) argues for the unity of theory and practice and proposes that in

carrying out research we can think of our work as “being an apprentice to one’s own changing practice”.

## **Thesis Structure**

The next chapter is a literature review, which examines the different understandings of literacy and how these influence approaches to literacy education. The chapter further explores the influence of Paolo Freire and presents background information about adult education in Latin America. It reviews existing research and reports about the training of adult literacy facilitators and finally introduces some of the theoretical concepts of Pierre Bourdieu that have been used in research related to literacy.

In chapter 3, I present the context of adult literacy in Guatemala with special reference to the work of CONALFA, using Bourdieu’s concept of field. This is set within the wider field of power: political and social aspects of Guatemala’s history. I also examine my own position in the adult literacy field, showing how this influenced the work I was able to do.

Chapter 4 sets out the research methodology, tracing my changing approaches to the research and discussing the ethical issues I am concerned with. *Sistematización de Experiencias* (systematisation of experiences), a Latin American methodology, is presented and its use in the research explained. The pilot literacy programme is described in some detail, showing the links between the research methods and the data produced.

The following three chapters are devoted to the results of the research. Chapter 5 offers portraits of the seven ALFs involved in the pilot programme. Drawing on interviews, I present aspects of their initial approach to adult literacy education; and using data from class observations, feedback sessions and workshop discussions, I explore how their practice developed during the time of the project. I return to Bourdieu’s framework, particularly the concepts of *capital* and *habitus* to understand the differing responses of the ALFs to the work.

In chapter 6, I question some of the claims of empowerment that appear in international discourses on women’s literacy by describing the varied positions of the literacy group participants in their communities and examining some of the learning strategies that they brought to the groups. Chapter 7 looks at the collaborative learning that was enabled through regular workshops and exchanges, and the extent

of collective generation of knowledge among the pilot literacy project team, through the systematisation workshops.

The final chapter brings together what was learned by all of us who participated in the research. I return to the ethical questions raised in Chapter 4 and report on discussions held with the pilot team and their responses to my thesis during a final visit to Guatemala in 2018. I also return to the field of adult literacy, ALFs' position in the field and how this impacts on their work. This leads to some policy recommendations about the training, development and general treatment of Adult Literacy Facilitators.



## 2. Adult Literacy: Theories and Practices

### Introduction

Literacy is a contested concept. There are different understandings of what it is, ongoing debates within literacy research and diverse approaches to literacy education. As pointed out by UNESCO, (2010:20):

While the concept of literacy has evolved over time, no global consensus on the definition has emerged.

Added to this is the question of language. The English term 'literacy' has no equivalent in some languages. In Spanish, the word used for literacy education is *alfabetización* which implies the teaching or learning of the alphabet, with the term *post-alfabetización* used for literacy education beyond learning the alphabet. There is also the related term of *alfabetismo* which is literacy as a skill or a practice, rather than a learning process and is used when referring to the literacy rate. The adapting of the word 'literacy' in English to describe competence or confidence in other areas such as financial, health, computer or emotional literacy is not helpful as it shifts the original meaning of the term and has added to the difficulties of translation. In Brazil the term *letramento* has come into use in certain research circles to enable discussion about literacy in the wider sense but the equivalent *literacidad* in Spanish has not been taken up as it is seen as a translation from English (Mora, 2016).

There is general agreement that certain populations have less access to literacy education and less developed skills and practices. These include those living in poverty, rural populations, women, ethnic and linguistic minority communities, people living in areas of conflict and disabled people. The Education for All goals, agreed at the World Education Forum in 2000, included the goal of reducing illiteracy by 50%. Only 17 countries were able to achieve this target by 2015 (UIL, 2016).

The Global Campaign for Education published international benchmarks for adult literacy after broad consultation (Archer et al., 2005:3). They stress the point that literacy is a continuum:

Literacy should be seen as a continuous process that requires sustained learning and application. There are no magic lines to cross from illiteracy into literacy. All policies and programmes should be defined to encourage sustained participation and celebrate progressive achievement rather than focusing on one-off provision with a single end point.

The benchmarks, which have gained wide acceptance, include a number of recommendations on government responsibilities, financing, recruitment and pay for facilitators, language choice and teaching methods.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has been at the forefront of work on adult education and adult literacy since its inception. The first International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA) was held in 1949. UNESCO's work illustrates and highlights the debates, contradictions and compromises of adult literacy education. CONFINTEA VI was held in Brazil in 2009 and ended with the *Belém Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2010). The document notes the lack of progress since the previous conference 12 years earlier:

Crucially, the expectation that we would rebuild and reinforce adult learning and education in the wake of CONFINTEA V has not been met (...) The field of adult learning and education remains fragmented (p.11).

The persistently vast scale of the literacy challenge presents an indictment of the inadequate adoption of the measures and initiatives launched in recent years (p.12).

Low levels of adult literacy continue to be a concern and literacy education is seen as a priority, particularly in Africa and Latin America (UNESCO, 2013; 2016). The *Belém Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2010) calls for increased funding for adult literacy and improved quality of provision.

In the first part of this chapter I present different understandings of literacy and their impact on literacy education. In the next section, I review a selection of Latin American writing about literacy and adult education and following this I present previous research about adult literacy facilitators and recommendations about their training. Finally, I look at the theoretical concepts of Pierre Bourdieu and how they have been used in literacy studies.

## **Understandings of Literacy**

In the second Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) (UNESCO, 2013:21) titled *Rethinking Literacy*, five approaches to literacy are identified:

- 1) literacy as skills, particularly the ability to read, write and calculate, sometimes called cognitive skills or a set of cognitive processes;
- 2) literacy as applied, practised and situated, or as tasks that require the written word, such as functional, family and work-based literacy;

- 3) literacy as a set of social and cultural practices embedded in specific socioeconomic, political, cultural and linguistic contexts, including schools, family and community contexts;
- 4) literacy as capabilities, reflected in the ability of the person using the skills to achieve their purposes and their communicative goals; and
- 5) literacy as a tool for critical reflection and action for social change, also referred to as critical or transformative literacy.

I will use these categories as a framework for exploring different understandings of literacy. However, these five approaches are not separate and exclusive. There is overlap and continuity between them. Many functional literacy programmes offer a two-step approach with a skills-based initial literacy phase and a functional second phase. Women's literacy programmes, that take a functional approach to health issues, also claim outcomes of empowerment and transformation. Capabilities can be linked to functional or critical literacy. Rosa Maria Torres (2009) points out that there is a great deal of confusion about the different terminologies used in the adult education field in Latin America and that practitioners are often unaware of the significance of different approaches. This is partially caused by the turnover of staff and the lack of professionalisation. The authors of GRALE 2 also acknowledge that there is a lack of clarity in the use of terminology:

Terms such as *literacies*, *literacy practices*, *basic literacy*, *initial* or *advanced literacy*, *functional literacy* and *post-literacy* are used with widely different, and sometimes unclear, meanings in policy, programme and academic contexts (UIL, 2013:20).

### **Literacy as Skills**

At the start of UNESCO's work in the 1950s, the 'literacy as skills' approach was dominant. In 1958 UNESCO defined a literate person as one who could "with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his or her everyday life" (UNESCO, 2005:153). Literacy was presented as a stand-alone skill based on learning the sounds of letters in alphabetic writing systems, on the assumption that this was the essential skill needed to become literate. It was linked to behaviourist educational philosophy and modernisation theory in development. Anderson (1966, cited in Barton 1994) famously suggested that a national 40% literacy rate was required for economic take-off.

This raises the question of how the literacy rate is measured. Nationally developed definitions of literacy include: "ability to read and write simple sentences," "ability to read a letter or a newspaper" or completion of primary schooling (UNESCO, 2005:157).

In this way, the same person could be classified as literate in one country and illiterate in another. In addition, not all children completing primary school gain the expected levels of literacy, while data based on self-reporting during census or household surveys cannot be fully reliable. The statistics therefore will always be broad estimates.

The *Belém Framework for Action* (UIL, 2010) recognised that literacy is a continuum, not a dichotomy and any measurement of literacy must take this into account. However current testing regimes and calculations of a 'literacy rate' are still based on a binary view of literacy (UNESCO, 2013). There is no accepted way of assessing literacy levels understood as a continuum. The introduction of testing, which gives results by levels, is costly and full of pitfalls. Guadalupe & Cardoso (2011) point out that tests may not be appropriate for the required data; local knowledge may be ignored in favour of centralised cultural assumptions while those schooled in test techniques may perform better. They argue that in a context of political motivation for providing statistics, testing may become "a meaningless fad" (p.212) and that where a test regime is not 'fit for purpose', the money would be better spent in other ways.

Although understandings of literacy have moved on, the method of teaching inspired by the concept of literacy as skills continues in use. A photograph in a recent UNESCO (2017:13) publication shows a woman in a literacy class in Turkey, filling a page of her notebook with repeated copies of the letter 'f'.

## **Functional Literacy**

In 1978, UNESCO recommended a functional definition of literacy:

a person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his or her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community's development (cited in UNESCO, 2013:20).

'Functional' literacy goes beyond the idea of literacy as skills, setting literacy in a context. Functional literacy programmes initially focused on employment or income-generation, often creating a two-step process of basic literacy on the skills model, followed by "post-literacy" of reading instruction texts on the relevant topics.

Functional literacy training ... gives precedence to *content*. It claims to be a method of improving the productive capacities of a man [*sic*] as a worker by enabling him [*sic*] to acquire through the medium of reading and writing, the theoretical and practical knowledge needed for a development "project." (UNESCO 1976:39)

An early example of the functional literacy approach was the Experimental World Literacy Programme co-ordinated by UNESCO in 11 countries in the 1970s. The results of the programme were disappointing, with only one in four of the participants reaching the final stage. The evaluation report noted the tension between the technical aspects of the programme, and the political, social and cultural contexts at local level (UNESCO, 1976).

Functional literacy approaches continue in use. While working in Ethiopia in 2008, I found that functional literacy was being introduced as a 'new' methodology. Large print books, with illustrations about bee-keeping using modern hives, were translated into local languages as part of this initiative. There was a well-established local tradition of bee-keeping, with hives made of hollowed logs hung in trees, but the project ignored this indigenous knowledge. Learning to read is not essential for acquiring practical skills. The functional literacy approach does not recognise the forms of knowledge transmission that exist in oral societies (see Santos, 2014).

Functional literacy has also been extended to instruction on health-related topics often aimed at women. However, as Robinson-Pant (2001) in Nepal and Papen (2001) in Namibia both observed, women attending literacy programmes were already familiar with the health messages that appeared in the texts they were given to read. In a review of 'post-literacy' materials, Rogers (1994) critiques the 'literacy first' model and suggests that reading materials that already exist in the relevant community should be introduced in initial literacy rather than relying exclusively on the primer and then moving to instructional texts for functional literacy.

### **Literacy as Social and Cultural Practices**

In *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, Street (1984) challenged the then still widely-held assumption, originally developed by Goody (1977), that literacy enables abstract thinking and is the great divide between 'primitive' and 'modern' cultures. This idea that literacy is linked to specific cognitive processes, further developed by other writers, has been labelled by Street as the "autonomous" (p.19) model of literacy.

During ethnographic studies in a village in Iran, Street (1984) observed different forms of literacy: learning to read the Quran, a local form of writing for trade purposes and later, the literacy practices introduced through state schools. He argued that literacy is socially constructed, embedded in social institutions. The context in which we learn to read and write shapes our understandings of literacy; literacies are multiple. He calls

this view of literacy the “ideological” model (1984:95). Street critiques development planners’ obsession with measuring the impact of literacy in terms of development goals and the deficit model that adult literacy programmes work with. He calls for research that recognises the agency of learners and analyses how they ‘take hold’ of literacy (Street, 2001:8).

Street’s original work and the work of others cited below, who have identified literacy as social practice, have led to the development of *New Literacy Studies* (NLS). Researchers working within this tradition use ethnographic methods to record situated literacy events and analyse them in terms of understanding literacy practices. This has produced a wealth of descriptions of how people engage with written texts. Some of the research has examined literacy teaching programmes, finding that formal literacy classes using traditional teaching methods fail to enable people to read and write in any meaningful way. Programmes often ignore local literacy practices and participants’ existing engagement with written texts (Robinson-Pant, 2000; Papen, 2001; Rogers & Uddin, 2005; Chopra, 2011).

Rogers and Uddin (2005) cite a number of examples in Bangladesh that demonstrate that individuals find ways of developing literacy skills independently when they need them for work. Adults learn what they need, as they need it, through practice; their learning is not sequential and structured. However, in adult literacy classes, “the epistemology is ‘learn first and then practice’” (p.236). Robinson-Pant (2008:790) describes the different understandings of literacy evident in development work: planners perceive literacy as leading to pre-defined change; facilitators may be hoping for empowerment while the learners themselves have a “complex web of reasons” for attending the classes, which are different to planners’ perspectives.

McCaffery et al. (2007) point out that NLS is concerned with analysing literacy as social practice rather than offering a model for literacy programmes. However, they describe a project in Nepal where research on literacy practices and discussions with potential participants preceded the planning of the programme. Judith Kalman (2003) has stressed the importance of researching literacy practices and challenges, that exist in the community, in planning literacy programmes, and recommends making maximum use of the resources and knowledge that exist locally. Rogers and Street (2012) also propose that identifying the interests of learners and the literacy practices they already engage in and bringing these into the class is the best way for literacy learning groups

to work. The *Belém Framework for Action* (UIL, 2010:13) acknowledges that this rarely happens:

Only rarely are needs assessment and research conducted on a systematic basis in the planning process to determine appropriate content, pedagogy, mode of delivery and supporting infrastructure.

### **Literacy as Capabilities**

Literacy as capabilities has its roots in the work of Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2000). Sen's pioneering work on human capabilities and his view of development as freedom led to the setting up of the Human Development Index (HDI) which assessed development in a more complex and nuanced way than reliance on economic measures.

The HDI was created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone [...] The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have [*sic*] a decent standard of living (UNDP, n.d.)

The capability model is an alternative to both human capital theory and rights-based development, focussing on the quality of life. Capability theory makes a distinction between ends and means. Income or literacy are not ends in themselves, but a means to achieving freedoms. Both Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2006) present literacy as an essential aspect of human development and consider illiteracy as a form of deprivation, incompatible with well-being. They focus specifically on the situation of women.

(Robinson, 2003; Maddox, 2008). As Sen (2003:25) argues:

Indeed, not being able to read or write is a significant barrier for underprivileged women, since this can lead to their failure to make use even of the rather limited rights they may legally have.

Nussbaum (2000:230) introduces the concept of combined capabilities: personal and social. A woman may have gained education at a personal level but if her social situation does not permit her to work outside the home, the capability is not complete. The central question of the capabilities approach is "What is she actually able to do and to be?"

Sen's work assumes that education in itself is a universal good:

Basic education is a truly social good, which people can share and from which they can jointly benefit, without having to snatch it from others. This old insight is worth recollecting (2003:21).

However, this ignores the colonial legacy of schooling, the inappropriate curriculum for many communities, poor quality of teaching and resources and the fact that inequality is reproduced through the education system. Sen's claims for the value of literacy in dealing with legal problems or his statement that illiteracy prevents political participation have been questioned by ethnographic studies (Chopra, 2004; Rogers and Uddin, 2005; Marinho, 2013). Luke & Freebody (1999:5) report that a number of studies of literacy capabilities show that "access to different kinds of educational experiences becomes both a symptom and a cause of literacy performance." Schooling arrangements do not develop equality of literacy capabilities.

Literacy as capabilities is not always considered a separate approach. A UNESCO (2017) document issued to celebrate 50 years of work on literacy, presents four conceptions of literacy where critical literacy is renamed literacy as empowerment and the capability approach is omitted.

### **Critical Literacy**

In 1976 an International Symposium to discuss progress on adult literacy issued the *Declaration of Persepolis* which defined literacy as a right:

...literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society [...] it also stimulates initiative [...] and participation in the creation of projects capable of transforming [the world] and of defining the aims of an authentic human development [...] Literacy is not an end in itself. It is a fundamental human right. (p.274)

The declaration was strongly influenced by the work of Paulo Freire (1996a:53), who had recently published his classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which he analyses the oppression and exploitation of peasants that, he argues, leads to a culture of silence.

What he terms 'banking education' plays a role in this process:

Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive... the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits [...] In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing.

This form of education denies the learners the chance to build critical consciousness and develop knowledge:

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful enquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other.



Freire proposes a dialogic, problem-posing education as the way to achieve this:

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation (1996a:64 original emphasis).

In preparing the literacy teaching programme within this model of education, Freire worked with a professional team who carried out research with the target community to identify themes or contradictions that impact on the lives of the people. Generative words were identified, to create literacy materials, where a word starting with each letter is selected to represent a theme and then the syllables are used to create new words. In discussing the themes, the participants in the literacy groups become familiar with the letters and syllables and so learn to read both the word and the world. Using this dialogic methodology in North-Eastern Brazil, Freire (1996b) claims to have taught people to read in three months.

In making this claim, Freire implicitly accepts the binary definition of literacy and ultimately links literacy to the learning of letters. By bringing a team of experts to research the themes for the literacy programme he implies that the participants themselves cannot identify these. It requires an educated outsider to analyse the realities of their lives in order to raise their awareness of their own oppression. Brown (1994, cited in Archer & Cottington n.d.) argues that Freire undervalues the existing knowledge and beliefs of the literacy learners he is working with while Rogers and Street (2012) consider that Freire presents a deficit view of literacy learners.

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was written while Freire was in exile in Chile, working as an adviser to the Christian Democrat government on their agrarian reform programme. The book drew on his experiences in Chile as well as his earlier work in Brazil. Revisiting the text twenty years later, Freire (2004:34) describes the political ferment in Chile during the time that he worked there:

a grand context of theory in practice, in which those who arrived from other corners of Latin America would discuss, with Chileans and foreigners living there both what was going on in Chile and what was going on in their own countries.

This period was the run up to the election of Salvador Allende, the first Marxist president in Latin America, heading a government of Popular Unity. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is best understood as a product of that time, a pedagogy for working with peasants who were developing demands for a different world that would end their exploitation. The pedagogy would enable them to analyse their oppression more

effectively and so raise their political consciousness. It was presented as a contrast to the didactic explanations of political leaders that Freire critiques. The methodology he proposes for this context cannot be readily transferred elsewhere. However, the central idea of his work, that education must question and subvert the established order has been taken up and reinterpreted in a variety of contexts. Literacy programmes which take up this challenge, stating aims of critical reflection and empowerment are often referred to as Freirean.

Freire (2005:x) made clear that people should not try and replicate his work but develop their own ideas:

It is impossible to export pedagogical practices without reinventing them. Please tell your fellow [...] educators not to import me. Ask them to recreate and rewrite my ideas.

One recreation of Freire's work is the REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) method developed by Action Aid in the 1990s, which while influenced by Freire's aims also integrates participatory methods based on the work of Robert Chambers (2002). In the *Reflect Mother Manual* that sets out their method, Archer and Cottingham (n.d.) argue that Freire's writing is difficult to understand and not easily accessible, particularly by those who have been denied education and whose lives he wanted to transform. They also point out that although many literacy programmes claim to be influenced by Freire, the reality is far from his vision. Archer and Cottingham also propose a research process in the local community to identify local issues. But the REFLECT approach rejects Freire's use of the primer, turning instead to participatory methods that include making maps, matrices, calendars and diagrams.

By 2003, Reflect was being used by 350 organisations in 60 countries, offering literacy in the context of analysis and questioning of power.

Increasingly *Reflect* practitioners therefore start from the wider struggle for freedom – focusing on issues of social, economic and political justice. In that process *Reflect* enables people to start to assume the power of literacy – to deal effectively and without intimidation with those situations where literacy impacts on their lives (Archer, 2003:40).

However, a later review of Reflect programmes (Duffy et al., 2008) found a range of practices and varying benefits. Some groups focussed more on literacy while others had goals related to empowerment. The two were not always effectively integrated and where literacy was the main aim, the dialogic method was often lost. Within

REFLECT programmes, local practices developed as facilitators interpreted the method within the context of their own experiences and knowledge. Discussion was often interpreted as question and answer with the facilitator offering the correct answer (Fiedrich, 2003; Nalwonga 2003).

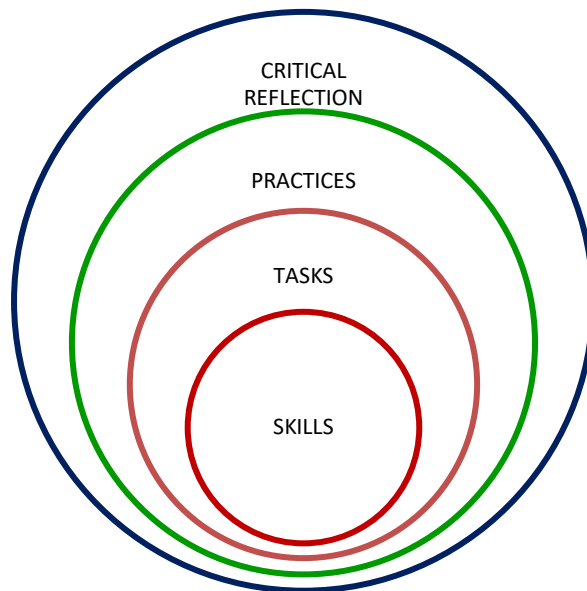
Eventually REFLECT became a 'brand'. Robinson-Pant (2000:37) describes how an NGO in Nepal wanted to have their literacy work described as REFLECT although they had been using participatory methods before the method was established. The NGO workers explained that:

REFLECT is currently "making a lot of noise" (publicity) and there would be better funding prospects and career opportunities by adopting the label.

Like other radical initiatives that are absorbed into the mainstream, in some situations, the REFLECT method lost its challenging character.

### **Integrated Approaches**

McCaffery et al. (2007:2) propose that the different approaches to literacy can be seen as integrated and represent this view as a series of concentric circles (Fig:1).



*Figure 1: Integrated Literacy (Adapted from McCaffery et al., 2007:2)*

Literacy is rooted in the skills of reading and writing. These skills are used by individuals to accomplish tasks in their daily lives. These tasks are part of their literacy practices, socially and culturally rooted in the communities in which they live and work. Literacy can be a means for critical reflection on the world as part of a process of change.

They rightly propose that literacy education programmes need to address all these different aspects of literacy: developing decoding skills, offering opportunities for undertaking functional reading and writing tasks, developing literacy practices relevant to the community, while also enabling critical reflection on the world and promoting the possibility of transformative change. This pragmatic approach was incorporated into the pilot literacy programme which is presented in this thesis. McCaffery et al. recognise that the combination of these four aspects varies according to the contextual situation of literacy projects.

Despite the continued discussions at international level, reflected in UNESCO publications, the dominant view of literacy is still one of human capital and functional literacy. The *Belem Framework for Action* made a commitment to representing literacy as a continuum:

ensuring that all surveys and data collection recognise literacy as a continuum (UNESCO, 2010:6).

Nevertheless, Sustainable Development Goal 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" sets a target 4.6 for the 'achievement' of literacy, so maintaining the literate/illiterate binary:

By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy (UN, n.d.).

The Incheon Framework for Action (2016:47) for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4, does, however, offer a broader understanding:

A contemporary understanding of literacy not as a simple dichotomy of 'literate' versus 'illiterate', but as a continuum of proficiency levels.

But achievement of literacy is linked to school-based learning, stressing functional rather than critical aspects of developing literacy:

By 2030, all young people and adults across the world should have achieved relevant and recognized proficiency levels in functional literacy and numeracy skills that are equivalent to levels achieved at successful completion of basic education.

This emphasis on school-based learning, with its related assessment regimes, detracts from campaigns for making literacy education critical and based on local practices. The power of the World Bank and the influence of educational publishers maintain discourses of economic returns (Archer, 2017). Luke (2012:71) argues that literacy is defined by the "corporate commodity of the instructional package" which is valued over

local idiosyncrasies, with the development of literacy materials benefitting publishing profits.

The debate about literacy continues, with narrow understandings of a binary nature still prevalent, operationalised in low-cost ineffective provision. Critical approaches, that aim to transform lives, exist at the margins, run with limited short-term funding by NGOs. In many cases the aims of empowerment remain at the level of rhetoric alone.

## **Adult Education in Latin America**

Adult Literacy in Latin America needs to be understood in the context of wider debates about adult education. In the first part of this section I will summarise some further aspects of Freire's work and describe the impact this has had on the development of popular education and literacy programmes. In the second part I will present information about research in adult education, including work undertaken in the tradition of NLS.

### **The Influence of Paulo Freire**

In a review of developments in non-formal education in Latin America, La Belle (2000) points out that from the 1950s to the 1980s Latin America was at the forefront of non-formal education. The Cuban and Nicaraguan literacy campaigns, community education initiatives in Mexico and Bolivia, programmes of political consciousness-raising in Brazil and Chile based on the ideas of Freire, and radio broadcasts in Colombia and Ecuador were seen as models of good practice and reproduced in other places.

Caruso et al (2008:42) emphasise the importance of Freire's influence in the development of such initiatives:

It is impossible not to recognise the motivating forces of the thought and pedagogy of Freire and his influence on the education movement at all levels\*

Freire's dialogic methodology was used in a variety of community education initiatives which became known as Popular Education. According to Osorio (2016), this created a shift across the continent in the way that Adult Education was understood, linking it to political awareness and social movements for change. Many forms of popular education emerged, shaped by the needs of specific historical moments. In spite of

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\* My translation. All citations translated from Spanish are marked with an asterisk

the diverse situations in different Latin American countries, there was a common aim of social transformation (Bartlett et al. 2011; Schmelkes, 2011).

Freire's legacy has been variously interpreted and used. Ecuadorian educator, Rosa Maria Torres (1997), describes how wherever she has travelled, she has met people who have been influenced by Freire but have understood his work in different ways. Because of the complexity of Freire's writing, many people who support his ideas may not have read his work directly. However, there are a number of organisations that promote his ideas. The Council for Adult Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CEAAL) which was set up under Freire's presidency in 1982, produces two regular publications on popular education: *La Piragua* and *La Carta* (CEAAL, n.d.). There are also a number of websites that list and discuss citations from Freire's work, eg: *resumenlatinoamericano.org*; *pensador.com* and *educacionparalasolidaridad.com*. When introducing adult literacy facilitators to Freire's work for the first time, these were a valuable source of materials accessible for people with limited reading practices.

Freire's ideas were used in literacy classes run by revolutionary organisations in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala during periods of armed struggle; and after the success of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, a mass literacy programme was organised inspired by his methods. The campaign was seen as a political process, in which the primer acted as the Sandinista manifesto (Archer and Costello, 1990). The campaign mobilised thousands of school students, named *brigadistas*, who went out to rural areas to teach literacy and spread the revolution. Training was minimal and the physical hardships and initial resistance that the *brigadistas* encountered were daunting. But with time, they realised that the "illiterate" peasants were not ignorant and after some months the process bore fruit:

Eventually it began to work. My students learnt how to write machete and I learnt how to use one. (Brigadista Rodriguez, cited in Archer and Costello, 1990:31)

This mutual learning was very much in line with Freire's dialogic philosophy. The links created between urban youth and *campesinos* (peasants) during the campaign, politicised a generation of young people who had no previous experience of the lives of rural communities (Lankshear, 1993; McCaffery et al. 2007).

However, the follow up to the literacy campaign, where local people would work as facilitators for further adult learning was not well planned and did not continue directly

from the process (Torres, 1993). In such a situation, if what has been learned is not extended into daily practices, or is insufficient to tackle most of the formal texts that learners wish to access, the newly learned skills will be set aside and may be lost (Torres, 2006)

Torres, who collaborated on the Nicaraguan campaign, was later director of a four-month mass literacy campaign in Ecuador. Here she took a different approach, adapting Freire's generative themes from topics where participants would analyse the injustices they suffered, to themes of human rights, allowing people to imagine the kind of society they wanted:

Instead of showing reality as it is, we wanted to show reality as it should be. That is, a right, the jump from a need to a right\* (1993)

In contrast, many other government literacy programmes in Latin America were based on a deficit model, equating illiteracy with ignorance (Bartlett et al., 2011). In research with literacy learners in Brazil, Bartlett (2007) noted that people attending literacy classes linked to schools, expressed feelings of shame about their illiteracy while others attending 'Freirean' programmes gained confidence. Literacy classes using Freirean methods were usually organised by NGOs or popular organisations.

Mercedes Ruiz Muñoz (2004) describes the hostility and mutual suspicion that existed between formal literacy programmes and popular education. The popular education movement saw 'second chance' adult education as anchored in the school system and questioned its value and legitimacy. From the point of view of formal literacy programmes, popular education was seen as linked to revolutionary movements with literacy subordinated to political intentions.

### **Research on Adult Education**

Research on adult education was strong in Latin America up to the 1980s but after this there was a major decline (Ruiz Muñoz & Torres Sanchez, 2001). The need for more research was raised at the CONFITEA VI conference (Rodriguez Moncada, 2010). Medel-Añonuevo et al., (2011) argue that this research needs to examine the connections between education and politics and move away from the collection of statistics.

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\* My translation. All citations translated from Spanish are marked with an asterisk

Torres (2009), who wrote the Latin America and Caribbean regional synthesis for the conference, found that there had been little progress in adult education and no references were made in national reports to the policies agreed at CONFINTEA V. The concept of Lifelong Learning had limited acceptance in Latin America and adult education was still seen mainly as adult literacy and second chance education. There has been a move to formalise this area of work, creating equivalencies with primary education and providing certification, and in the process, the aims of empowerment, participation and transformation have been lost. Torres argues that there is a need to recover this mission.

Latin America is a highly unequal region and illiteracy is linked to poverty. The lowest levels of literacy are found in rural areas, among women and in indigenous communities. Existing education systems are not working to change this situation of inequalities. Investment continues to benefit those who access higher levels of education, while those who have been historically excluded are offered the least resourced, poor quality education. Policies to improve this situation may exist but they are not put into practice (Torres, 2009; Campero, 2010; Medel-Añonuevo et al., 2011).

A number of writers have commented on this situation of inequality. Gadotti (2011) notes that illiteracy is caused by economic and social inequality and the right to education has to be associated with other rights, while Schmelkes (2008) argues that literacy can only be achieved when the material conditions of people's lives improve. She refers to the culture of silence and points out that in literacy classes participants are rarely given the opportunity to write their own words. Carlos Torres (2011) makes the point that because the majority of adult education service users are poor and politically weak, adult education does not have a high profile. Bartlett et al. (2011) show that a small minority of youth gain an education that enables them to enter the knowledge economy while the majority are relegated to the informal sector, low paid work or unemployment. Gomes de Castro (2004) raises the issue that the worst aspect of this is that inequality has come to be considered inevitable and natural.

Schmelkes (2011) also points out that adult education provision has not addressed the needs of indigenous communities, who have least access to education and the lowest levels of literacy across Latin America. The contents of adult literacy programmes are usually not relevant to the lives of indigenous communities. Although intercultural bilingual education has been developed in schools, this approach was not transferred



to adult education at the same time (Schmelkes, 2001). Teaching methods are often not appropriate to indigenous culture and people are not consulted about the methods or content (King et al., 2004). The drop-out rate in schools is high, so maintaining the need for adult literacy classes in the future (Verdugo & Raymundo, 2009). Cutz and Chandler (2000), researching the reasons why indigenous Mayas did not attend literacy classes in Guatemala, found that they felt that the classes were dangerous to their own cultural values.

Interest in New Literacy Studies (NLS) has developed mainly in Brazil and Mexico. Kalman and Street (2013) edited a collection of writing on literacy and numeracy in Latin America, which uses the framework of literacy and numeracy as social practices. Marinho (2013:21) suggests that interest in NLS in Latin America is partly due to:

the fact that these studies bear a strong resemblance to the thinking of Paulo Freire deeply marked by the political, sociological and anthropological foundations of alfabetização, reading and writing.

Working within the NLS tradition, Kalman (2005) carried out an ethnographic study of a women's literacy group in Mexico. The research team took on the facilitation of the group after the original teacher left. Kalman's research is unusual within NLS as she studies learning taking place in a group that she is involved in working with. She explores the backgrounds of the women in the group and their previous engagement with literacy as well as surveying the presence of written texts in their homes and in public spaces. Unlike most ethnographic research of literacy classes which finds that not much is learned, she describes how the women supported each other and learned together. The group produced their own calendar reflecting seasonal work and festivals. Kalman won the UNESCO 2002 International Award for Literacy Research for this work.

Kalman (2002) critiques the methods used in adult literacy classes, based on decontextualised skills training and argues that literacy needs to be understood as written culture. Drawing on Vygotsky (1978), she asserts that knowledge is built through social interaction and exchange and suggests that this needs to be taken into account in the teaching of literacy. She also calls for more research in the Latin American context on the way that written texts are used as communicative practice.

Influenced by Kalman, Seda Santana and Torres Vazquez (2010) carried out research on uses of literacy in a poor district of Mexico City. They asked women to report what uses of reading and writing they made at home. Some of the women found it difficult

to do so because they did not consider actions such as reading recipes, writing shopping lists, keeping records of spending or helping children with homework to be literacy practices. Literacy is understood by many people to be what happens in school rather than the uses they make of reading and writing in their daily lives.

### **Training of Adult Literacy Facilitators**

Many writers comment on the problems regarding the lack of adequate training for adult literacy facilitators and adult educators more generally. Youngman and Singh (2003:1) state that "adult educators are key agents in the implementation of adult learning, but their concerns and training needs are often neglected." They argue that the importance of training for adult educators, including adult literacy facilitators, was not sufficiently addressed at the CONFINTEA V conference (UNESCO, 1999). Rogers (2005) expresses concern at the lack of information and research on the training of ALFs in the Global South in recent years in contrast to the 1970s and 80s when a number of reports were published. He stresses the need for more current research as it is widely recognised that training of ALFs is crucial to the success of adult literacy programmes and that many programmes fail because of poor training provision.

Messina (2005) notes that not only is adult education a marginalised field, but the training and professional development of adult educators is even more neglected. She points out that although there was an adult literacy goal in the Education for All agreement, there was no mention of training for ALFs in the World Education Forum (2000) Framework for Action. The focus on primary education meant the work of adult literacy was largely left to NGOs and the voluntary sector.

ALFs come from a variety of backgrounds and work in different contexts. Some are school teachers offering literacy classes to adults outside the school day, others are volunteers, while some are adult educators teaching literacy as part of their wider work. Community activists may take on the work of literacy education; and social workers, or those working in rural development or women's rights, may also become literacy facilitators (Messina, 2005; Caruso et al., 2008). The problems of adult education are often blamed on the low level of preparation of the teachers, creating a deficit view of adult educators. Government organisations providing adult literacy and basic education usually offer training in the form of tools or techniques that enable effective administration of the packages being used. Training is often organised using

a cascade model with decisions made at the centre and exported to the periphery (Messina, 2005).

Rogers (2005) reports that training programmes for ALFs vary greatly in length and content and depend on the programmes and organisations that they work for. Although some form of needs assessment may be undertaken, ALFs are generally not consulted about the content of their training. Evaluation of training provision does not lead to major changes and it is usually only in continuing in-service training that ALFs' stated needs or requests are taken into account. There is a growing tendency to provide one-off workshops on specific topics, often delivered by people external to the programme. NGOs tend to have better training than national programmes. However, expectations of what ALFs should be achieving in their work are usually unrealistic in relation to the training and payment they receive.

In a regional report for Latin America and the Caribbean on youth and adult education, Caruso et al. (2008) claim that the need for improved professional development of educators is recognised, but the response is still weak. Changing socio-economic situations, increasing migration and the recognition of diverse needs increase the complexity of the adult and youth education sector and the increased need for relevant training for the educators. In countries with large rural and indigenous populations, educators have usually been recruited from these communities, in response to issues of cultural identity in some cases and lack of funding in others. Such volunteers are rarely offered substantive training or adequate support. Caruso et al. suggest that developing appropriate training for these contexts could improve the quality of provision offered.

The international benchmarks on literacy recommend that ALFs should be paid the equivalent of primary teachers and be offered quality training:

Facilitators should be local people who receive substantial initial training and regular refresher training, as well as having ongoing opportunities for exchanges with other facilitators. Governments should put in place a framework for the professional development of the adult literacy sector, including for trainers and supervisors, with full opportunities for facilitators across the country to access this, e.g. through distance education (Archer et al, 2005:33).

McCaffery et al (2007) propose a training model with four stages, which enable trainers to build on issues emerging in practice:

1. Initial training of at least a week.

2. Observations of literacy sessions by the trainer to support and give feedback to the ALFs and to identify any issues that need to be addressed in further training.
3. Follow up training where issues identified during observations are addressed.
4. A second level of training for ALFs who have gained experience and want to take their practice further.

However, Rodríguez Moncada (2009) points out that training events do not necessarily develop or change the practice of adult educators. Responsibility and personal commitment are important factors in professional development. He argues that the role of adult educators should be to design strategies that enable participants to develop. We need to be aware that learning occurs outside formal educational setups, through dialogue and social interaction.

Lave (1996:13) argues that in formal education knowledge is decontextualized. There is a contradiction between the idea of learning as the product of the transmission of existing knowledge and the idea of knowledge as situated, as the “production of knowledgeability as a flexible process of engagement with the world”. She argues that formalised, decontextualized knowledge is more highly valued, a position which is socially produced. Such understandings of knowledge can impact on the way that training for ALFs is developed.

Writing about the situation in south Asia, Dighe (2003), points out that training of ALFs in large-scale literacy programmes has mostly focussed on the use of the primer and has excluded issues of adult psychology and learning. NGOs are more likely than government programmes to link literacy learning to community development and use participatory methods. Messina & Enriquez (2003) report a similar situation for Latin America but add that even within the NGO sector it is difficult to move educators away from a teacher-centred model. They claim that popular educators are the most likely to use reflective practice and argue that literacy programmes could learn from their experience.

The experience of the first REFLECT programmes shows both the difficulties and successes of implementing a participatory popular education format. In the projects set up by Action Aid in Bangladesh, El Salvador and Uganda (Archer and Cottingham, 1996), ALFs received 10 days training before the start of the project. In El Salvador, the NGO partner in the project had already been running literacy courses with primers and the team found it difficult to move from the traditional methods they had been

using, to the participatory, dialogic approach of the REFLECT programme. However, some groups did manage to adapt to the new approach. The ALFs had the opportunity for regular fortnightly sessions which allowed the development of a strong team feeling. ALFs built confidence, made changes and were able to challenge the leadership of the programme on a number of issues that emerged during the project. In Uganda most of the ALFs had no previous teaching experience, which Archer and Cottington considered:

was a big advantage in absorbing a methodology so different from that of the top-down formal education system (and even many other literacy methods) in Uganda (p.22).

In an interview about her experiences in the Ecuadorian literacy campaign, Torres (1993:3), also noted tensions between qualified teachers and student volunteers. Aware that the volunteers came from what she names a 'deficit' schooling system, the programme aimed to offer them an integrated training, which would enable them to go beyond 'teaching to the primer':

So that they would understand what they were doing, take decisions and not only resolve problems but anticipate them. We also wanted the young people to reflect critically on the national reality, the education system and their own place within it.\*

The training started five months before the literacy programme, using distance learning, building up a collection of simply written accessible booklets that covered social issues related to the rights-based approach of the programme as well as pedagogical methods. Centrally made videos were used in training workshops to avoid the distortions common in cascade methods of training. While the training offered to the young people was mainly explanatory, the literacy campaign ended with a conference where the young volunteers were given the opportunity to present their views on the education system. In reflecting on their experiences in the literacy campaign, in which they had acted as teachers, they were able to analyse problems in the education system based on their own needs as students. Through this process of reflection and analysis they were able to make valuable proposals for radical change in the national education system. Although the literacy campaign took place in 1989,

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\* My translation. All citations translated from Spanish are marked with an asterisk.

Torres, who recently re-published the interview on her blog, argues that the issues are still relevant today.

Messina (2005:12) argues that it is important to value the experiences that ALFs bring to their work, their local knowledge and the commitment and solidarity they have with the communities that they are rooted in. Training should be dialogic, breaking down the barrier between trainers and trainees and responding to the specific local situation, creating a "space of dialogue where we all act as learners, willing to take risks, to grow and to share".\*

Much of the literature on the training of ALFs is in the form of reports based on surveys (Messina, 2005; Caruso et al. 2008) or in policy documents or handbooks that recommend how training should be implemented (Youngman & Singh, 2003; Archer et al, 2005; McCaffery et al., 2007). It is more difficult to find studies based on research with ALFs. This is the gap that this thesis sets out to address. An article that offers a glimpse of ALFs developing their practice is McCaffery's (2004) comparison of the training of women facilitators in Nigeria and Egypt. In Nigeria the programme was run in partnership with community development workers while the one in Egypt was managed by the military. McCaffery reports how the confident Egyptian women surprised the male trainers, who were initially doubtful about the women's ability to become teachers, due to their low levels of education. In the Nigerian community-based context the expectations of the facilitators' abilities were realistically higher.

The Nigerian programme, named LOCAL (Learner Oriented Community Adult Literacy) took a social practice approach to literacy education. However, a review of the programme reported that observations of newly trained facilitators showed that they had difficulties translating learning aims into learning activities and that this had not been realised during the initial training programme. The observation process enabled these difficulties to be identified and follow up training was able to address this issue (McCaffery et al., 1998).

McCaffery also worked on a Literacy and Peacebuilding programme in Sudan which used a similar community-oriented approach. In addition to the focus on local uses of literacy and participatory methods, far more attention was paid to training literacy facilitators in lesson planning and designing activities that would meet specific literacy learning objectives. A wide range of learning activities, using a variety of simply made teaching aids such as flash cards, were modelled; strategies for organising the work of

the group, in terms of matching people for pair work or stimulating group work were suggested; and specific methods for using maps and matrices for literacy learning activities were practised (Doe et al., 2004). In this way, the programme addressed some of the weaknesses that had emerged in the Nigerian programme.

Drawing on the ethnographic approaches of New Literacy Studies, Rogers and Street (2012) developed a training programme for literacy education managers and trainers of trainers. The LETTER (Learning for Empowerment Through Training in Ethnographic Research) project aimed to raise awareness among these decision-makers of the need to research local literacy practices, in order to develop realistic literacy learning programmes. The research undertaken by these decision makers in Ethiopia and India has been published (Nirantar, 2007; Gebre et al., 2009), showing a fascinating range of literacy practices among people usually considered illiterate. However, it is not clear how far this awareness will lead to more relevant training for ALFs or a serious change in mainstream literacy programmes. As Dighe (2003) points out: cascade models of training offer the greatest resources to the top layer and least to those who are performing the work at grass roots level.

More recent ethnographic research with ALFs in Ethiopia (Warkineh, Rogers & Danki, 2017:19), also in the NLS ethnographic tradition, explored the ALFs' own literacy practices, finding that those with a wider range of practices were more effective in motivating their participants. Warkineh et al. concluded:

Our studies suggest that a development programme for facilitators that focused on enhancing their own literacy practices could contribute to their effectiveness.

The most in-depth research with ALFs that I was able to find was a study of the social construction of the ALF role in Mexico, by Leticia Galván (2008). Galván analyses the historical changes that influenced ALFs' identity and the demands made on them. She notes the indifference with which society treats literacy workers. Because illiterate people are not valued, those who work with them find their work also devalued. All the ALFs she interviewed lived in precarious economic conditions and most had not exceeded the educational levels of their parents. Many talked of wanting to 'help' and 'support' the people they worked with. They gained satisfaction from seeing participants in their classes learn and advance, were motivated by a sense of solidarity and valued the experience they were gaining, although they did not always recognise themselves as learners in the process. Like Torres (1993), Galván also notes tensions between qualified primary teachers and volunteers in adult literacy programmes. The

teachers considered their training and experience the most appropriate preparation for teaching literacy to adults and did not accept that they needed additional training or professional development for this work. They felt that their professional position was undermined by the appointment of ALFs who had only completed secondary education.

Galván stresses that in spite of the satisfaction that ALFs reported, the lack of adequate pay and poor support led to a high drop-out rate among the volunteers and that this was a loss to the organisation they worked for. A vicious circle comes into being, where poor training and conditions lead to low retention and the turnover of ALFs makes investment in training non-viable.

Messina (2005) also emphasises the poor working conditions of ALFs, which can lead to very high turnover. The value of the training is thus lost in the longer term and the educators do not have the opportunity to further develop through practice. Campero (2001) argues that professionalisation and parity pay with schoolteachers is needed in order to attract people to this work. This view is also reflected in the international benchmarks on adult literacy:

To retain facilitators it is important that they should be paid at least the equivalent of the minimum wage of a primary school teacher for all hours worked, including time for training, preparation and follow-up (Archer et al., 2005:31).

Messina (2005) notes that increased bureaucratisation and school-based models pose a danger to participatory and dialogic approaches to literacy. She proposes training and development programmes that would bring together workers from different forms of adult education and in different positions: facilitators, co-ordinators, popular educators and materials designers. Organised in groups, they would be involved in the planning of training. Messina also argues that it is important that formal programmes and popular education initiatives should work more closely. She cites a number of innovative programmes as models. One of these, a rural development study centre in Mexico trains young people from peasant communities to work as adult educators, with a broad understanding of the meaning of adult education, allowing them to transform their own lives and work towards the transformation of the peasant communities where they work. In Peru, training for literacy education is presented as a process which brings different actors together. National and regional staff work with ALFs in a process of mutual exchange, promoting independent learning. In Ecuador, an initiative to train school teachers to work as ALFs brought in the Ministry of Education's Popular Education Division to run the training. Educational Action, a Brazilian NGO, offers



training to educators working both on government and popular education programmes. Specific training projects are designed in response to demands from educators, working with them to plan the programme. ALFs, co-ordinators, administrators and other adult education workers can attend the courses. Messina (2005:75) summarises her vision of training for adult educators:

Training placed at the service of critique, understanding by this not only the search for alternatives to the institutional but also the capacity to say “I will not be governed,” rebellion against dogma or regimes of truth established by the authorities, to open ourselves to new forms of search and discovery.\*

The third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (UNESCO, 2016) noted that while pre-service training for adult educators existed in most countries, it was not clear who the training was offered to or how many of those working with adults attended such training. Pre-service training was required in less than half the reporting countries. The report makes the following recommendations for training of adult educators:

- Existence of pre-service education and training programmes for ALE<sup>1</sup> teachers and facilitators.
- Requirement of initial qualifications for teaching in ALE programmes.
- Existence of continuing, in-service education and training programmes for adult learning teachers and facilitators (p.56).

However, as the lack of progress on previous declarations has shown, it is unlikely that this will become a reality in the near future. As Galván (2008:3) points out:

ALFs are still seen as a volunteers who in order to carry out their work are only required to hold a certificate that accredits their knowledge of basic education\*

## **Bourdieu’s Relevance to Literacy Research**

I find Bourdieu’s concept of *field* a powerful tool for understanding adult literacy in Guatemala. Bourdieu describes fields as social spaces, dynamic and fluid:

In analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation... (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:97)

The agents who participate in, or play the field hold different kinds of *capital*. In addition to the more obvious economic capital, Bourdieu proposes symbolic capital

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<sup>1</sup> Adult Learning and Education

which is cultural or social. *Social capital* results from networks which can be mobilised to improve one's position in the field, strengthening personal power. In Guatemala people join political parties with the hope that if their candidate is elected, this will lead to employment for them. Membership of the trade union in CONALFA gives social capital to the members.

*Cultural capital* is transmitted through the family and the education system and exists in three states: the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalised state. Embodied cultural capital is made up of the knowledge and tastes that people have acquired during their life and is lost when the holder dies. Objectified cultural capital exists in artefacts, such as books or artworks and can be transformed into economic capital. But cultural capital is only effective in the field if is:

appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go on in the fields of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1997:50).

So, knowledge of a Mayan language may not function as cultural capital in the literacy field if its value is not recognised by those in more powerful positions. Finally, academic qualifications exist as institutionalised capital, where their value is a result of their scarcity (Bourdieu, 1997). In Guatemala, such qualifications are dependent on fluency in Spanish as all education beyond primary school is in Spanish.

The players in a field use their different forms of capital to position themselves advantageously:

The strategies of agents depend on their position in the field [...] in the distribution of the specific capital and on the perception that they have of the field depending on the point of view they take *on* the field as a view taken from a point *in* the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:101).

Effective practice is likened to a "sense of the game" (Bourdieu, 1990, cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:120-121). The player appears to know instinctively how to operate in any given situation. This 'instinct' is the sum of the habitus that has been developed through the history of operation in the field. It is the habitus that enables people to play the field effectively and position themselves advantageously. Bourdieu defines habitus as:

a system of structured and structuring dispositions... which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions (Bourdieu, 1990:52).

There is a 'fit' between field and habitus. We may not be aware of our habitus but the choices that we make are shaped by it. There are certain actions that are not

conceivable, that are outside the possibilities of the structure of the field and the structure of our habitus (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Webb et al., 2002).

Habitus needs to be understood in terms of social relations:

To speak of habitus is to assert that the individual, and even the personal, the subjective, is social, collective. Habitus is a socialised subjectivity [...] The human mind is socially bounded, socially structured (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:126).

In addition to the three conceptual tools of field, capital and habitus, which make up the theory of practice, another fundamental aspect of Bourdieu's work is the reflexive approach. This means that the researcher's biases, predispositions and own habitus must be revealed and taken into account. I have tried to set out my own predispositions and habitus in the introduction. Bourdieu refers to 'participant objectivation', meaning that the researcher needs to become the object of research as much as the social field that is being studied (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As a practitioner researcher, working with the adult literacy facilitators as an educator and a researcher, it is important to develop and maintain a reflexive stance.

Many researchers have drawn on Bourdieu's work to analyse relations of power in the education field. Grenfell (2012) stresses the complexity of relations in the educational process and argues that the relationship between students and teachers is a social practice played out with the capital and habitus that they bring to the situation; habitus changes through the process of engagement in the educational process.

Bourdieu (1991) explores the symbolic importance of language in his concept of linguistic capital, stressing how certain forms of language acquire legitimacy in relation to symbolic power. Linguistic practices are linked to symbolic/cultural capital. Higher value is attached to written communication and written examinations. There is a gap between the language of the classroom and the language of the home or the community, with students often not understanding the schooled version of language. Drawing on the concept of linguistic capital, Grenfell (2012:68) offers this definition of literacy:

Literacy then means possessing sufficient and appropriate linguistic capital to occupy a desirable field position. Scholastic language will always presuppose a form of legitimation, consecrated as such by being enshrined in texts, schoolbooks, curricula etc.

This is very much the case in Guatemalan schools and adult literacy programmes, where Mayan languages are devalued, and a particular form of Spanish is imposed. In a 'post-literacy' language and communication textbook, commonly 'mispronounced' words are listed with their 'correct' pronunciation, indicating to learners that their ways of communicating are not valued by the educational institution.

Luke (2012:78) notes that subordinated or marginalised groups are failed by the education system and argues that:

Bourdieu provides a sociological vocabulary for explaining the bodily, linguistic and institutional machinery of educational failure, marginalisation and disenfranchisement.

Luke uses Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic violence*: "the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:167) in describing the structure of educational institutions, and comments on the difficulty of changing this.

Our efforts to offer plausible, powerful, positive theses and pedagogical reforms seem frustratingly blunt in policy, action, scale and generalizability. The reform of literacy education often feels like small-scale groundwork in the face of tectonic forces of class, capital and state (2012:76)

He argues that when students reject schooling, they may be rejecting such symbolic violence.

Heller (2012:50) presents literacy education as a Bourdieusian field, a site of power struggle where practices of symbolic domination exist:

a discursive space in which certain resources are produced, attributed value, and circulated in a regulated way, which allows for competition over access and, typically unequal distribution.

The field of literacy education shapes our understandings of these resources. As we are positioned unequally, we have different understandings of and access to the resources in the field. We play the field according to our different interests and positions. In playing the field we express our agency. Literacy is enmeshed in relations of power, with functions of social control, social selection, and symbolic domination.

Hardy (2012) also refers to the field in conceptualising literacy, proposing that: "literacy is best understood in terms of the relational structures between individuals

and the field itself" (p.156). Class practices are the interface between the habitus of the teacher and the participants, and the field of adult literacy:

legitimated knowledge is more accessible to some than others because of inherent patterns of cultural capital embodied in individual habitus (p.172).

In exploring how the literacy education field operates, Hillier & Rooksby (2005) note that symbolic power occurs when the players in the field accept the legitimacy of the various forms of capital of the dominant players. The dominated actors believe in the legitimacy of those who wield power. Actors in the field are structured by and also structure the power relations in the field on the basis of their habitus. Habitus is the product of experience and new experiences may reinforce our habitus or challenge it. Playing the game requires an awareness of other actors in the field but the level of consciousness in the enactment of our habitus varies.

The dispositions of habitus serve to predispose actors to choose behaviour that appears to them more likely to achieve a desired outcome with regard to their previous experiences, the resources available to them and the prevailing power relations (Hillier & Rooksby, 2005:22)

In developing the concept of habitus, Bourdieu states:

I wanted initially to account for practice in its humblest forms – rituals, matrimonial choices, the mundane economic conduct of everyday life, etc. – by escaping both the objectivism of action understood as mechanical reaction “without an agent” and the subjectivism which portrays action as the deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention, the free project of a conscience positing its own ends and maximizing its utility through rational computation (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:121).

One of the criticisms levelled at Bourdieu’s work is that habitus is static or deterministic and that it ignores agency and denies the possibility of change (Nash, 1990; Webb et al., 2002). However, Bourdieu provides a persuasive response:

Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal. (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:133)

Habitus develops and changes, generating inventions and improvisations, but within certain limits. When habitus that is formed elsewhere encounters a new field or situation “there is a *dialectical confrontation* between habitus as structured structure and objective structures.” (Bourdieu, 2005:46). Moreover,

in rapidly changing societies, habitus changes constantly, continuously, but within the limits inherent in its originary structure, that is within certain bounds of continuity (p.48).

However, Bourdieu argues that total transformations are rare and may be temporary. Research using Bourdieu's concept of habitus has shown how the habitus of teachers can work against learning, in contexts where students come from communities that do not share the middle-class values of the teachers (Modiba & Stuart, 2013; Muñoz et al, 2013; Woollen & Otto, 2013). Many teachers are not able to recognise and acknowledge the cultural capital of children that thrives outside the mainstream. They may be unconscious of their role, but they uphold the functions of the institution and collude in the symbolic violence legitimated by the concept of education. Thus, teachers' habitus works to maintain their own cultural capital; accepting the value of their students' unrecognised cultural practices would undermine the value of their own cultural capital.

From a Bourdieuan perspective "traditional teaching methods" represent a set of durable dispositions teachers carry with them. These dispositions shape attitudes and behaviors, creating an "automatic pilot" of responses to given situations and student populations (Woollen & Otto, 2013:19).

Although habitus is difficult to change, Woollen & Otto argue that shifts in teacher habitus can be achieved, though only slowly and laboriously. In their 5-year study of White teachers working in predominantly Black schools, in the USA, Woollen & Otto (2013:2) found that collaboration with an arts project enabled some of the teachers to change their habitus from perceiving the lives of their students as problematic to recognising them as creative young people and acknowledging the strengths of their families. Teachers need to see their own habitus as the problem, rather than the habitus of the students.

For equitable reform to occur, teachers must understand their own habitus and the habitus-forming experiences of their students as well as the cultural wealth of students and families.

The teachers who were able to make these adjustments to their habitus appeared to be more successful in their teaching generally.

The stability of habitus and the limits of change that Bourdieu posits, are a challenge for those working for change. Lawler (2004:125) addresses the pessimism of the concept of habitus. She finds the concept useful as a way of theorising a self that is socially produced, carrying a sense of both personal and collective history. Class, race, gender and sexuality are all included in the habitus. The judgements of others based on the authority conferred through a position in a field and the inequalities that are linked to these judgements are made real through habitus. Lawler accepts that

Bourdieu's analysis of domination and the reproduction of inequalities is pessimistic but does not accept that this indicates the determinism that Bourdieu has been accused of. She concludes:

Bourdieu's work is important in reminding us that pessimism is not the same as determinism; that resistance takes many forms; and that, in any case, for many groups of people, change is very difficult to effect, no matter how much they resist. This is what it means to be dominated.

Writing from a feminist position, Skeggs (2004:21) argues that Bourdieu offers three valuable contributions to understanding social relations: a link between structure and agency in the concept of *habitus*; a 'metaphoric model of social space in which human beings embody and carry with them the volumes and compositions of different capitals;' and reflexivity – the examination of the 'positions from which we speak.' Skeggs identifies this reflexivity as an approach that has been central to feminist critiques of 'masculine-dominated research agendas'. She finds that the strength of Bourdieu's analysis lies in his documentation of the practices of dominance, but she also makes the valid point that he shows little understanding of the practices of those he defines as dominated and he ignores values such as altruism, integrity and loyalty.

This weakness in Bourdieu's work also becomes apparent in my research when exploring the values that adult literacy facilitators bring to their work and the collaborative processes that enable their development. The *habitus* that each brings to the new situation influences the way that the collaborative work develops. Through a dialectical process, the collaborative learning and collective action shape the personal and professional development of the ALFs. Agency is expressed through the interaction of the individual *habitus* and the social situation in which the ALFs operate.

I draw on Bourdieu's work to understand the field of adult literacy in Guatemala and use his concepts of capital and *habitus* to make sense of the positions of adult literacy workers in the field. I present the context of the research using Bourdieu's analytical tools in the next chapter.

### 3. The Field of Adult Literacy in Guatemala

#### The Field of Power

To use the concepts of field, capital and habitus in research, Bourdieu identifies three steps.

1. Analyze the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power [...].
2. Map out the objective structure of the relations between the positions occupied by the agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate form of specific authority of which this field is the site [...].
3. Analyze the habitus of agents... (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:105, *numbering added*).

In this section I will present a brief outline of the field of power in Guatemala. This is inevitably a partial and selective analysis, but I hope can set a framework for understanding the field of adult literacy.

Guatemalan society shows high levels of inequality. The coefficient of human inequality is 29.1 compared to the UK's 7.8 while inequality in education is more marked at 36.2 (UK 2.8). Only 62% of adults have completed primary school and among the poorest quintile (mainly indigenous) only 40% achieve this level. 50% of children in urban areas attend secondary school but only 10% in rural areas. 9.3% of the population live in extreme poverty, (less than US\$1.9 a day) a quarter of school age children are working, and malnutrition is high among indigenous children particularly in rural areas (UNDP, 2016; UNESCO, 2016).

The main axis of inequality is ethnicity, intersecting with gender and class. Although estimates vary, about half the population is indigenous, mainly Mayas who live predominantly in rural areas



Figure 2: Map of Guatemala showing distribution of languages



and make a living in agriculture. There are 21 Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala (Fig:2) and two other minority languages but Spanish is the only official language. K'iche' and Mam are the most widely spoken Mayan languages with an estimated 1 million speakers of K'iche' and 700,000 of Mam (Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib, 1993). These are the two languages spoken in the area where I worked.

During the colonial period, indigenous peoples were enslaved and forced to work for Spaniards, who took control of the land. The invaders were incapable of recognising and engaging with the richness of Mayan knowledge. They burned the vast majority of the books and killed the sages, priests and scribes, so destroying much of the written knowledge. They attempted to convert the people to Catholicism and teach them to speak Spanish to facilitate control. Resistance took various forms, including flight into the forests and the setting up of new hidden settlements. Cultural integrity and oral knowledge were generally maintained (Farriss, 1984; Gonzalez Orellana, 2011; Guzman, 2016).

Guatemala gained independence from Spain in 1821 and the new government promised to integrate and bring development to indigenous communities. However, in reality, it implemented racist strategies of segregation and pursued assimilation through monolingual education policies and conscription into the army (Cojtí Cuxil, 2009). When the liberals came to power in 1871, Guatemala was transformed into a 'coffee plantation state'. The new social order took advantage of the existing systems of servitude, enforcing the labour of indigenous people on the plantations, thus continuing colonial power relations (Tishler, 2001).

The Education Reform of 1875 led to the assimilation of selected young indigenous men, who trained as teachers in the new Normal Schools. Indigenous people were to be integrated into the national identity project:

We need to give the Indians the means to leave their communal system, their common and unchanging dress, their barbaric diet... their antediluvian languages; their rural, primitive and rustic homes (Batres Jáuregui, 1893, cited in Davis 2004)

This was a demand for assimilation in the guise of an offer of education.

The 1944 revolution, led by students and teachers and supported by urban workers, that overthrew Jorge Ubico, the last of a string of dictators, led to the election of Juan José Arévalo, a professor of education, who had originally studied in the Normal Schools of the 1875 Education Reform. Literacy was a condition for voting in that

election, which meant that 90% of indigenous people were excluded from the vote (Tishler, 2001). Under Arévalo's presidency, popular education programmes, including adult literacy, were implemented. The new law aimed for:

Intense and methodical action for the incorporation, the teaching of literacy and Spanish for all the indigenous elements of the Republic\* (Article 4 of the literacy law, cited in King et al., 2000:11)

Gonzalez Orellana (2011) argues that illiteracy was a product of the inequalities of the land tenure system and the exploitation of the peasantry. Jacobo Arbenz, who followed Arévalo, initiated an ambitious land reform with mobilisation of *campesino* (peasant) committees as its implementation strategy. Up to 100,000 peasant families benefitted from the reform. The United Fruit Company, concerned about the threat to their vast holdings in Guatemala, lobbied the US government to back a coup, which overthrew the revolutionary government in 1954. The distributed lands were returned to their former owners (ODHAG, 1998; Cullater, 2011; Grandin et al. 2011).

The CNCG (National Peasant Confederation of Guatemala) which had been active in the reform process suffered severe repression after the coup. It was eventually replaced by the CUC (Peasant Unity Committee) which emerged in 1978 and was a powerful force for peasant demands, representing large numbers of indigenous farmers. A group of CUC representatives, who occupied the Spanish embassy in a protest action, were murdered when the embassy was set on fire. In reaction to this massacre, the armed uprising, initially started by army officers after the 1954 coup, gained strength and spread across the country (ODHAG, 1998).

During the conflict, peasant organisations offered literacy classes, based on the ideas of Freire, with the support of the Catholic Church (Fernández, 2011). While these education programmes dealt with class issues, they did not address questions of racism or gender inequality. Mayas linked to the guerrilla organisations understood oppression as a class issue and this is demonstrated in the Spanish name of the guerrilla army that was made up almost exclusively of indigenous fighters: *El Ejército de Los Pobres* (The Army of the Poor). De Souza Santos (2014) argues that orthodox Marxist groups organising in Latin America in the 1970s and 80s ignored or denied the ethnic dimension of exploitation. However, some indigenous organisations were

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\* My translation. All citations translated from Spanish are marked with an asterisk.

analysing their position as a question of a repressed people (*pueblo*) (Bastos & Camus, 2004).

The retaliation of the military to the armed uprising was brutal. Falla (1992) describes the systematic escalation of atrocities inflicted on Maya communities in order to quell the rebellion. These included mass rape and sexual enslavement of women by the military. The horrors of the war were described in detail by Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú (1983), whose father was killed in the Spanish embassy fire; and documented by the Inter-diocesan project for the recuperation of historical memory (ODHAG, 1998) and the Commission for Historical Clarification. About 200,000 lives were lost in the conflict, 83% of these Maya. 93% were killed by the state's forces, 3% by guerrilla groups, the rest unknown. One million people were internally displaced and 150,000 fled across the border to Mexico. The Commission for Historical Clarification's final conclusion was that "agents of the Guatemalan state carried out acts of genocide against the Maya people" (cited in Grandin et al., 2011 p.393). The worst massacres took place in the *departamentos* of Quiché, Alta Verapaz and Huehuetenango, all predominantly Maya areas (ODHAG, 1998).

General Ríos Montt, de facto head of state in the early 1980s at the time of the worst atrocities, was tried for genocide in 2013 and found guilty. However, the trial was then declared invalid by the constitutional court during the presidency of Otto Pérez Molina who, as a military commander at the time of the conflict, is also alleged to have been implicated in massacres of indigenous people. Ríos Montt remained under house arrest and died in 2018.

Despite the horrors of the war, Maya organisations and consciousness grew through the period of struggle and representatives of a wide range of Maya organisations came together to actively participate in the peace negotiations (Davis, 2004). A peace treaty was eventually signed in 1996. However, it could be argued that the oligarchic concentration of power and the social inequalities that led to the uprising have hardly changed today. In nearly all measures of education and human development collated by UNESCO or UNDP, Guatemala appears near the bottom of the list for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Ethnicity intersects with class and gender in the field of power. While ethnic monitoring in Guatemala lists four groups: *Maya*, *Ladino*<sup>2</sup>, *Xinca*<sup>3</sup>, and *Garifuna*<sup>4</sup>, some writers identify *Criollos* as a distinct group. Criollo was the name given to Spaniards born in the colonies but is used today to identify Guatemalans of European descent. The ruling élite comes mainly from this group. Quemé Chay, elected in 1995 as the first Maya mayor of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala's second largest city, describes the relationship of this group to state power:

The state has been conceived, constructed and used by an economic élite intimately linked to western cultural thought, which manifests racist and manipulative attitudes towards the majority of the ladino and indigenous population, using education, religion, the army and other institutions of the state to preserve the status quo, to prolong and finance the privileges of this economic class\* (Quemé Chay, 2009:187).

Massive demonstrations against corruption in the summer of 2015 led to the collapse of Perez Molina's government. He and his vice-president Rosana Baldetti, both from the *criollo* class, are currently standing trial in a series of corruption cases. Their party, the *Partido Popular* has been dissolved because of fraudulent funding processes (*Crónica*, 2017). This is just the most recent of an endless stream of corrupt practices that are bankrupting Guatemalan public services. A previous Executive Secretary of CONALFA told me that he had been sacked from his post because he refused to enter into an arrangement with the Minister of Education to syphon off CONALFA funds. His allegation was verified by a senior manager at CONALFA. It remains to be seen if any of the corruption charges against the ruling elite will lead to prison sentences. Alongside corruption, impunity is a central theme of Guatemalan political life.

I have already noted that rural Mayas identified with the peasant class. But class divisions also exist among the Mayas. Smith (2005) describes the growth of a K'iche Maya entrepreneurial class in the Western Highlands of Guatemala from the end of the 19th century, creating a space for Mayas to construct an identity beyond that of peasant farmer. Over a period of 50 years, Maya entrepreneurs took over from Ladinos the running of a range of businesses, a development that has no parallel in other Latin American countries with large indigenous populations. This Maya élite,

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<sup>2</sup> people of mixed heritage who have lost links to indigenous culture

<sup>3</sup> a small non-Maya indigenous group

<sup>4</sup> descendants of Africans and indigenous Carib people settled on the Caribbean coast of central America

while facing persistent racist discrimination by Ladino organisations and the state, maintained their indigenous identity while at the same time moving away from the class interests of their rural peasant counterparts (Otzoy & Sam, 1990; Dueholm Rasch 2011; Velasquez 2011). Grandin (2000) claims that this bourgeois class betrayed the struggle of the poor rural Mayas against the repressive state. However, Velasquez (2011) points out that many young people from this Maya élite joined the guerrilla armies.

Bastos and Camus (2004) argue that the Maya movement is multi-faceted, working through peasant organisations, human rights campaigns, women's groups, trade unions, universities, churches and NGOs. A unity of identity combines with a diversity of expressions. Mayas have entered the political system and become mayors and ministers. Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, a Maya intellectual, became vice-minister of education. Yet there is recognition that the majority of the indigenous population living in poverty in rural areas, and particularly women, continue to be excluded from these forms of political participation.

The Maya public intellectuals that have emerged since the conflict have received their formal education through the Spanish language and become partially integrated into Ladino culture. Their ethnic identity issues often focus on maintaining Mayan languages and re-learning Mayan spiritual practices in addition to their struggles for recognition of Mayan rights and equality in the public sphere. In rural areas, Mayas living in extreme poverty continue to speak their native languages and maintain many traditional practices (Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib, 1993; Smith, 2005). Their key struggles are about land tenure, food security and access to services such as health, education, water, electricity, drainage etc. There have been many collective protests about these, some of which led to gains and improvements but many also to repression and eviction (Sandoval, 2011; UNDP, 2016).

Gender inequality is apparent at all levels of Guatemalan society. While there are some women in powerful public positions, such as the current and previous Attorney Generals, only 20 of 158 MPs elected in 2012 were women (Sapón, 2012) and out of 14 ministries in the current government, only three are headed by women (*Crónica*, 2016). Most of the women in these positions come from the Criollo élite.

Many Maya women in the western highlands are small-scale traders with the majority of vendors in the large markets being women. They may hold regular stalls or bring

their own agricultural produce and find a space on the ground in the market area to sell. There are also many small local shops managed by women. Grandin (2000) shows how K'iche women who did not have access to bank loans, organised alternative business networks, supporting each other through personal, family-based loans.

Velasquez (2011) argues that in spite of their economic independence, these women accommodated to the patriarchal norms of their communities and participated in the reproduction of gender inequality. Cultural unity in the face of continued racism has led to the acceptance of traditional gender norms, where marriage and motherhood is valued over education and professional work. Across the three generations of women that she carried out research with, there was increased access to education and more participation in public life among younger women, but this was still difficult in the face of women's domestic duties and the need to *atender* (attend to the needs of) their husbands, children and parents-in-law. Women's participation in political activity often consisted in preparing food for major events.

Women suffered disproportionately during the armed conflict, with rape being used extensively by the army as a weapon of war (ODHAG, 1998). In 2016, three soldiers were finally tried and sentenced, after 30 years, for the sexual enslavement of Maya women during the conflict (*El Diario*, 2016).

Many women lost their husbands and found themselves struggling as sole providers for their families. They organised searches and denounced the disappearance of family members. They led demonstrations, confronted violence with courage and created new spaces for social participation (ODHAG, 1998). CONAVIGUA, an organisation of war widows, was particularly active in the peace negotiations. Organisations of women returning from exile in Mexico fought for the rights of returning refugees and demanded that land should be registered in the names of both wife and husband in the case of married couples. The National Women's office, which was at the time preparing for the Beijing women's conference, also supported the negotiations for women's rights (Deere and Leon, 1999).

The Inter-diocesan project for the recuperation of historical memory (1998:27) recorded the actions taken by women:

Women who for so long were invisible to society must now be recognised as agents of change and their contribution must be respected and valued as an example of dignity and defence of life.\*

But this movement for change is a long, slow process and many of the Accords on women's rights have not been implemented. Guatemala has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest rate of femicide in the world with 846 women killed in acts of gender violence in 2014 (*El Diario*, 2017). Use of contraceptives is rare among young people and teenage pregnancy is widespread, especially in rural areas (UNFPA n.d.). Some of these pregnancies are results of rape. The maternal mortality rate is 140 per 100,000 live births (UNDP, 2016).

Velasquez (2011) lists six demands of the K'iche women she interviewed. These can be seen as equally valid for Ladinas:

1. The right to make their own decisions
2. Access to all levels of education
3. Freedom to participate in social, political and professional spaces
4. Less control by in-laws
5. Male participation in household tasks
6. An end to being treated as the property of fathers, passed on to husbands.

She argues that gender equality can only be achieved if women and men work together for change.

There are many national and international NGOs working on gender issues and women's rights and this is evident in the ease with which women I met talked of their rights while then describing so many instances of how these rights are violated. Some indigenous women reject the initiatives on gender equality brought by international development agencies and propose different approaches to women's issues. There is a perception that the fundamental values of the culture can be reinterpreted to increase equality. The indigenous concepts of complementarity, duality and equilibrium are used for this purpose (Sieder & Macleod 2009).

Camus (2001) lists a wide variety of women's organisations showing both their common and diverging concerns and aims. She claims that women are rejecting easy labels and that they combine identities and belonging. There is of course an important question about what it means to be a woman and Maya in a culturally diverse Guatemala. But what all these organisations have in common is that they are working towards the aim of increased social justice.

## CONALFA and the Field of Adult Literacy

Adult literacy work can only be understood within the context of the field of power which I have tried to outline above. In this section I attempt to analyse the field of adult literacy in Guatemala.

The Comité Nacional de Alfabetización (National Literacy Education Committee) known as CONALFA offers literacy classes for adults and young people over the age of 15 across Guatemala. The estimated national adult literacy rate is 81% (UNESCO, 2016). CONALFA was set up in 1986 when the armed conflict in Guatemala was waning, a civilian president had been elected and negotiations towards the Peace Accords were under way. The committee agreed to prioritise bilingual literacy in indigenous areas and work with women. Literacy classes were generally delivered by NGOs with CONALFA having a co-ordinating role. A group of educators in the Western Highlands carried out research in the local communities to develop a Freirean teaching approach. This led to the publication of a primer called *iQué aclare! iQué amanezca!* (Let the Dawn Break) which, while designed for work in the local region, was later extended for use across the country, where the selected topics and vocabulary were not always relevant.<sup>5</sup>

After four years, a review of the literacy programme was carried out and the reviewers reached the conclusion that the system was not working. This led to a crisis in the committee and eventually the Executive Secretary, 300 municipal organisers and 5000 literacy facilitators were sacked (Arimany, 2011). Arimany argues that this was a bold and necessary step while a senior manager I spoke to who had been with CONALFA from the beginning, denounced it as an injustice and a reaction to the fact that the Freirean methodology was leading to political demands. CONALFA was reorganised to deliver more traditional literacy classes, introducing a variety of methods and projects over the years. Several of these were functional literacy programmes where the post-literacy level was linked to income generation (Burgos Paniagua 2014).

Today their vision appears as:

To reach, by 2021, a literacy rate above 96% offering the newly literate population skills and knowledge that enable them to participate actively in the improvement of their quality of life and to reach their development in response to socio-cultural and productive economic needs (CONALFA, n.d.)

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<sup>5</sup> From interview with departmental literacy co-ordinator



Three levels of literacy are offered:

1. *Fase Inicial* (initial literacy), considered equivalent to the first year of primary education
2. *Post alfabetización 1* (Post-Literacy) equivalent to years 2 and 3 of primary education
3. *Post alfabetización 2* which leads to a certificate of primary education in adulthood

Figure 4 shows my understanding of the structure of the adult literacy field. During my first year of doctoral fieldwork, in 2014, I had the opportunity to carry out interviews with 11 members of staff at CONALFA's national office as well as with an ex-Executive Secretary. The description set out below is based on information gained through these interviews and other more informal conversations as well as my experience of working with CONALFA over a number of years.

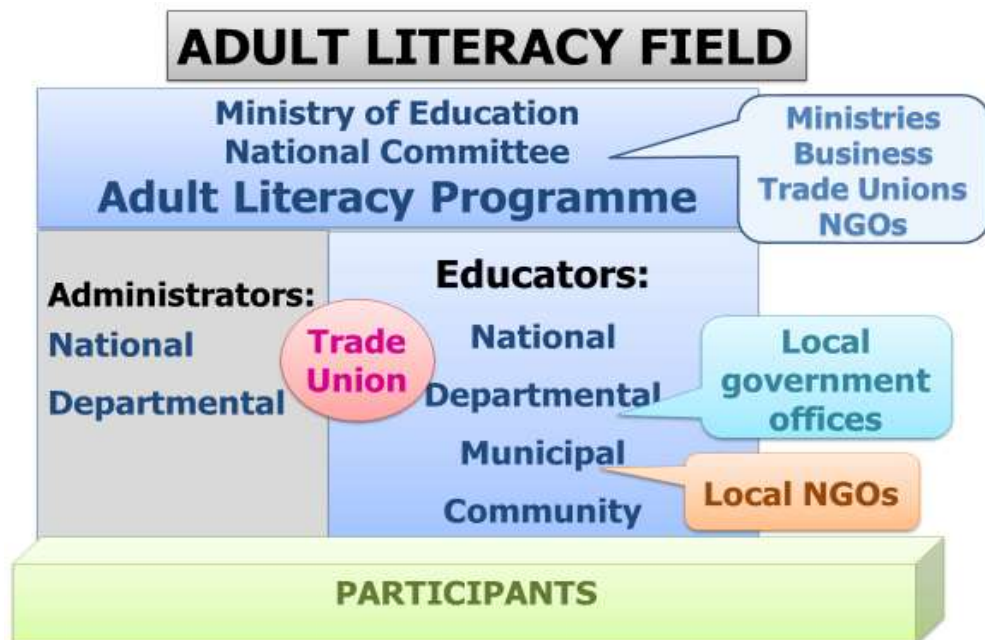


Figure 3: Field of Adult Literacy in Guatemala

CONALFA is the main organisation working in the field of adult literacy in Guatemala. It is governed by a committee of 17 members drawn from ministries, NGOs, the business sector and trade unions. But the Minister of Education can overrule any decisions taken by the committee. At national level the organisation has agreements with NGOs and private companies that support literacy work. Some of these organisations may run literacy programmes but usually the support is financial or in the

form of materials. At local level, NGOs collaborate with CONALFA by organising new groups, supporting participants, providing resources and offering venues for classes. The post of Executive Secretary of CONALFA is a political appointment and the incumbent is usually changed after a change of government. However, changes may occur for other reasons. During the six years of my contact with CONALFA, the Executive Secretary was changed three times for different reasons.

The national programme has a Spanish section and a bilingual section, which works in 17 Mayan languages and two other minority languages. Bilingual literacy was introduced during the period when the Peace Accords were being negotiated. Low levels of literacy among indigenous communities are a result of the history of conquest and domination, systemic discrimination, policies of hispanisation and the continued poverty and marginalisation of large numbers of Maya and other indigenous people.<sup>6</sup> There are a number of issues that make delivery of bilingual programmes more complicated. Some indigenous communities are dispersed in remote areas, so it is difficult to organise viable adult literacy groups. Because of poverty and reduced access to education, indigenous people are less likely to have completed primary school so recruiting ALFs in indigenous areas is more difficult. Those who went to school will have learned to read and write in Spanish and would need to learn to write their Mayan language, so requiring additional training. Spanish is the only official language of Guatemala and there are very few written texts in Mayan languages, while reproduction of Mayan literacy materials is more expensive because of small print runs.

Workers in the bilingual department, often with lower academic qualifications, argue that the needs of indigenous people are not prioritised, and they require additional resources. On the other hand, at least one Ladino that I interviewed expressed his frustration that he was unable to get a permanent job with CONALFA even though he had a master's degree, as he was not bilingual. His institutional cultural capital of qualifications was losing its value as those supporting indigenous issues used the social capital of their networks to strengthen their position in the field.

CONALFA has an office in each of the 22 *departamentos* (Fig:4). A departmental co-ordinator is responsible for the overall programme, supported by a small team of

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<sup>6</sup> From interview with ex-Executive Secretary of CONALFA

administrative staff and pedagogical advisers. Municipal literacy co-ordinators (MLCs) are responsible for delivery. They recruit adult literacy facilitators (ALFs) who are then expected to find enough participants in their neighbourhood to form a group. The MLCs run initial and in-service training for the ALFs and visit their classes once a month or less, depending on their workload.



Figure 4: Map of Guatemala showing departamentos

In 2014 I also interviewed three members of staff of local NGOs in my research area who identified themselves as working with popular education methods. I found that literacy was not included in their work. NGO staff expressed the view that they did not have the relevant skills to teach adult literacy. There seemed to be a perception that literacy education is best left to CONALFA – the experts.

CONALFA, as an institution, has a hierarchical structure which, as one interviewee pointed out, permeates through the organisation even to the relationship that ALFs have with their participants. This structure facilitates the positioning of those who have gained access to senior posts usually through some form of social capital, which I would argue, typically takes precedence over cultural capital. I witnessed a number of conversations where people talked openly about how entitlement to a job was dependent on political alignment and contacts, rather than relevant skills or experience.

For some time, CONALFA had implemented a policy of declaring municipalities “free of illiteracy.” This supposedly means that 96% of the population in the area can read and write. In 2013 the education minister had insisted that this process should move to the level of *departamentos* and that six *departamentos* should be declared free of illiteracy. Not surprisingly, this was not achieved so the following year, 2014, against

the recommendations of CONALFA managers, the minister took a decision to allocate nearly half the national adult literacy budget to those six areas. They were chosen on the basis that they had the best chance of achieving full literacy: small populations, high levels of literacy and large numbers of Spanish speakers. In other words, the funding had gone to those areas with the least need. And the remaining *departamentos* had their funding slashed.

I asked about this issue during the interviews at the national office, which gave me insight into positions taken by staff. Those whose social capital was based on their links to the government party were unlikely to be critical of this policy decision. They justified it in a number of ways: that in the provinces with less funding and smaller targets, quality would improve; that organisations working in *departamentos* that are free of illiteracy would be able to provide better training: "It's not the same to train a midwife who can't read or write as one who can read and write;" and that achievement of zero illiteracy could then be moved from region to region so that eventually illiteracy would be eradicated from the whole country.

There were also criticisms of this decision that displayed the tension between field workers, who travel across Guatemala visiting and observing community-based literacy groups, and office staff:

These are decisions taken from a desk. We only hear about them when they've been taken. It's always like this. Those of us who work in the field, the decision reaches us last\* (Interview with technical staff member, 2014).<sup>7</sup>

Significantly, there was protest action against the decision, mainly by ALFs and co-ordinators in Guatemala City. They organised a demonstration and took legal action. Their social capital came from solidarity, from working in various campaigns with residents in the poor neighbourhoods where literacy classes were held.

Some educators that I interviewed resigned themselves to the situation and limited their manoeuvres to those sections of the field where their cultural capital of educational experience was acknowledged and valued:

This was a severe blow for us. But [...] we are an institution like many others with a hierarchy where the directives come from above. So those of us working at the technical level have to accept the

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<sup>7</sup> Extracts from interviews with CONALFA staff, including ALFs are formatted in this way. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and all translations are my own.

little that we have and work willingly because that's what is left to us.

These are political situations which are not within our reach. We don't have any say in the matter. [...] Sadly, that's how it is (Interviews with technical staff, 2014)

The players in the field are generally united in their belief in the value of adult literacy education: that being able to read and write is important, that everyone has the right to learn to read and write, that adult literacy provision will enable people to learn and will make a difference to their lives. This acceptance is what Bourdieu terms *illusio*. In accepting the values of the field, participants also absorb the practices and power relations of the field:

Each field calls forth and gives life to a specific form of interest, a specific *illusio*, as tacit recognition of the value of the stakes of the game and as practical mastery of its rules (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:117)

Subscribing to the *illusio* leads these workers to becoming complicit in the hierarchical structures that limit their ability to act.

In Figure 4, above, the ALFs are virtually invisible. They appear as educators at community level. Although the work of ALFs is central to literacy education, they are at the periphery of the field and the positioning that takes place within it, excluded from decision-making processes. They are not consulted about any aspect of their work, not even about their own perceived training needs. While CONALFA has commissioned research on participant needs and reasons for drop out, no research has been carried out about ALFs' work. As many of the ALFs have told me, CONALFA makes many demands but offers very little in exchange.

The trade union mainly represents Municipal Literacy Co-ordinators (MLCs), although other staff are also members. ALFs are not eligible for membership as they do not have formal employment contracts. Excluded from the trade union, the ALFs are deprived of this potential social capital. They lack cultural capital in terms of formal education and the structures of the literacy programme leave them disempowered. Yet they also invest in the field, subscribe to the *illusio* of the importance of literacy education and in this sense are clear participants in the field. The ALFs' submission to the exploitative aspects of the programme is a form of symbolic violence, although they often reject this position by withdrawing from the work after their first year.

## **My Changing Positionality within the Field**

I started working as a volunteer with CONALFA in 2011. When I first met the Literacy Co-ordinators in the municipality where I was placed, they were very welcoming. When we discussed what kind of work I might do, one of them suggested that I could lead a workshop on environmental issues, which was a project theme that year, because, she said, "*Uds. saben de esas cosas*" (You people know about these things). Who, I wondered at the time, were these people that I somehow belonged to? Were we all foreigners? Women volunteers? Europeans? I found the answer some time later when this same co-ordinator told ALFs during a workshop, that they should pay attention to me as I came from a 'developed country'.

Not everyone agreed with the co-ordinator that coming from a 'developed' country qualified me to work in adult literacy in Guatemala, least of all myself. One ALF that I worked with told me that she had been anxious about my coming to visit her class because she was afraid that the participants would think: "*¿Qué puede saber esa gringa?*" (What can that gringa know?), although I suspected that it was she who thought this, rather than the participants. These two opposing views of my role, as foreign expert and ignorant *gringa*, set the scene for my work with the programme and my positioning in the field over the following years.

The MLCs had their office in a community centre. On one of my early visits to the office I found a crowd of ALFs gathered there. They had come to hand in their monthly reports without which they would not be paid. The MLCs are Ladinas and wear globalised clothes but many of the ALFs were wearing *corte* (indigenous costume). There was an atmosphere of animated communication among them which reminded me of meetings of community ESOL tutors in London when gathering for staff development afternoons. Adult educators working in the community, whether in London or in Guatemala, work in isolation, preparing their classes at home, working independently in their community venues, having the chance to exchange experiences and information only at team meetings. In spite of the distance and differences between us, there was a strong sense of recognition as I watched the ALFs on that day.

In that first year, I was tentatively taking my first steps, drawing on my cultural capital of qualifications and experience from the UK, to gain recognition and build credibility. I needed to extend my social capital by forming working links and networks. My habitus, developed in the specific context of adult education in London, had to develop

to fit into this new situation. I started with many doubts, I was indeed an ignorant *gringa*, knowing nothing about how literacy was understood and taught here. But once I started to visit and observe classes, I realised that there were methods, techniques and approaches that I could share with the ALFs that would facilitate learning for the participants. My ideas resonated with CONALFA discourses of empowerment and fitted with teaching materials that stressed active participatory methods. But ALFs with limited experience of formal education relied on their own experience of learning to read in primary school and reproduced these methods with the adult participants they were working with. I wanted to work with ALFs to introduce learning activities that enable participants to move beyond the mechanics of memorising letters and syllables to writing their own short meaningful texts, which could then become reading texts for others (Gardener, 1991; Mace, 1992).

It was with Ana, the ALF who was anxious about my visit, that I tried this for the first time. On a previous visit I had taken photos of all the participants and on this next visit I gave them the pictures printed on sheets with lines drawn in below. We worked together first, constructing a short text about one of the women. Then they worked in pairs and wrote about each other, with varying degrees of support. They copied their texts onto the sheets with the photos and from these we created a little booklet. Ana, who was a trained primary teacher, told me that she hadn't believed the women would be able to do this and was surprised when they did. She also reflected that because she and others had always experienced the same kind of education it was difficult to imagine doing it in another way. This was a way of expressing her habitus.

Bourdieu suggests that habitus can be changed through education or training:

Habitus is not something natural, inborn: being a product of history, that is of social experience and education, it may be *changed by history*, that is by new experiences, education or training (which implies that aspects of what remains unconscious in habitus be made partially conscious and explicit) Dispositions [...] may be changed by historical action oriented by intention and consciousness and using pedagogic devices." (Bourdieu, 2005:45)

What action or pedagogical devices, I wondered, would enable Ana to change this habitus? Would she be interested in changing? In accessing forms of education that she was not familiar with? Of trying out something new? Experimenting with different techniques and activities in her teaching?

That year the municipal programme was running a training and development programme for the ALFs. This was funded by an INGO working in the area, but the funding finished that year so there would be no development work with the ALFs the following year. I tentatively suggested that perhaps I could come back and offer a programme.

Meanwhile, returning to the UK, I registered for an MA in International Education and Development and came back the following year to do what we called a 'training needs analysis' as research for my dissertation. In this brief visit I was named by the co-ordinators as a researcher from an English university. My links to the university increased my social capital. The co-ordinators also interpreted the presence of a university-connected researcher as additional capital for their own positioning within CONALFA.

In 2013, prior to starting my PhD, I spent four months with the municipal programme, running workshops for the ALFs. The MLCs insisted that the workshops should be a *diplomado*, an accredited training course, and that ALFs would be obliged to attend. One of them asserted that if it was not obligatory, nobody would come. My own preference was that only those who were interested in introducing new activities into their teaching should come, but my position did not give me the manoeuvrability to challenge what the MLCs imposed.

During these four months, in addition to running workshops, I also worked in collaboration with individual ALFs and their groups. I invited them to sign up for these collaborations after the first workshop that I led. I knew that at the first meeting they were unlikely to see beyond my foreigner status, so it was important that they had at least a brief experience of my work. But even so, many did not have the confidence to approach me at this stage. The collaborations were an intensely valuable experience, which allowed me to observe how the classes worked, interact with participants, try out different activities and discuss the classes with the ALFs. I formed strong bonds with some of the ALFs and affectionate relations with most of the groups.

I also began to understand the hierarchical structure of CONALFA and some of the tensions in the field. I met staff from the departmental office but found that as the MLCs and staff at the departmental office were in conflict over a number of things, being aligned to the MLCs meant that I was unable to build links with the departmental staff. At the same time, I was surprised at how much freedom I had in planning and



running the *diplomado* and disappointed that the work was less collaborative than I had expected.

Coming back to Guatemala in 2014 as a PhD student, I had to gain permission for the research from the Executive Secretary of CONALFA. The MLCs supported me in this, redrafting my simple application into the baroque language required for formal requests in Guatemalan institutions. My application was opposed by at least one member of staff from the departmental office, so I was indebted to the MLCs for arguing my case. As a doctoral researcher, I was welcomed at the national office, offered the possibility of carrying out interviews with CONALFA staff and promised access to meetings. The interviews with CONALFA staff at national level extended my social capital. I identified people whose views I could align with and those who seemed willing to support the work I was doing. I also interviewed representatives of local NGOs and government departments, so enabling me to understand the work of CONALFA in the local context.

The decision that year to concentrate the adult literacy budget in six provinces had a profound impact on the ALFs. Because of the budget cuts in our area, ALFs were faced with three choices: to teach their groups as unpaid volunteers, to stop working for CONALFA or to search elsewhere for funding for their work. Elisa<sup>8</sup>, one of the ALFs I had worked with the previous year, was continuing as a volunteer because of her commitment to her students. But she was angry, arguing that zero illiteracy was not achievable:

CONALFA can't reach all the most forgotten corners of those *departamentos* and say come on, learn to read and write because the women and the men don't want to any more. They often say: it's too late for us, we don't have time, learning to read is no use to us. So it can't be done (interview with ALF, 2014).

A single mother who could not afford to work as a volunteer expressed her disappointment and frustration at losing the work after two years with CONALFA:

I felt that my abilities were going in the rubbish because I felt well-prepared to continue transmitting knowledge to these people. [...] I got left up in the air. [...] I was sad as much for the work as for the people (interview with ALF, 2014).

Inspired by the protest actions against the cuts in Guatemala City and talking with ALFs in the local area, we discussed what action could be taken. I arranged a meeting

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<sup>8</sup> All names used are pseudonyms

with a university professor of education, who was involved in indigenous politics and had a column in the local paper. Three ALFs came and told him about how the Ministry's decision to make cuts had affected them, in the hope that he would write about the issue in his column. There was some excitement at this point, plans for a petition and discussion about the possibility of setting up an association for ALFs. I was getting involved in action, aligning myself with the ALFs, becoming more of an insider.

I continued to offer training and development workshops and support individual ALFs with their groups and at the end of my stay that year, the MLCs told me that they had begun to appreciate me more. I was no longer a 'voluntourist', so many of whom come to Guatemala for gap years or to learn Spanish. By returning three times I had demonstrated my commitment and staying power.

Sadly, the newspaper article that we had hoped for never appeared; the petition, which needed to be worded in a specific legal format, was not ready before the end of the teaching period and the difficulty for ALFs of arranging further meetings because of poor travel infrastructure and costs meant that no further move was made on forming an association. Loss of contact with the Guatemala City activists left the ALFs without support and motivation dissipated.

Reviewing the work done with the literacy groups in 2013 and 2014, I realised that the literacy group participants had produced some interesting writing and on my return the following year (2015), it was agreed that we would publish a booklet of participant writing. I set about collecting and collating this work and gaining permission from the writers to have their texts and pictures in the booklet. Contacting the ALFs I had worked with, some of whom were no longer working with CONALFA, visiting the participants whose writing we were publishing to ask for their permission, I relived the work we had done together. I knew the origin of nearly every text in the booklet that emerged. It was a testimony to what is possible when people are given the opportunity to express something in writing as they are learning.

By 2015, one of the MLCs had retired and was not replaced. The other, now working on her own, drew me into her work and we collaborated more closely than had been the case in earlier years. She regularly attended the workshops I was again offering, and we started to plan them together. Her involvement legitimised my work. Whereas before my suggested activities were seen as optional extras, now they were endorsed

by the MLC, which led to more interest and engagement. At least one of the ALFs that I was working with told me that the support of the co-ordinator had made her take my suggestions more seriously and try to implement some of the activities I was proposing.

From this closer collaboration emerged the idea of a literacy programme based on the practices I had been sharing with the ALFs. We wrote a proposal and presented it to the CONALFA departmental co-ordinator. Although he rejected it, through the contacts that the MLC and now also I had with the national office, we were able to pursue it. The ALFs I was working with were invited to use some of the activities outlined in the project proposal and these activities were also modelled in the workshops we were running.

The launch of the booklet of writing by literacy group participants, in May 2015, was a decisive moment. All current literacy groups in the municipality were invited and the previous years' groups whose writing appeared in the booklet ascended the stage and talked about their work. Government officials made speeches, the local press was present, a representative of the CONALFA departmental office spoke on behalf of the co-ordinator and three people drove down from the national office. Suddenly I found myself being treated quite differently by CONALFA. As I had managed to raise the funding for the publication of the booklet, I had become, though on a very small scale, a donor. By the end of that period of fieldwork, I was assured that the proposed pilot programme would go ahead the following year.

The programme ran as a pilot in 2016, my last period of fieldwork, but the process of getting authorisation was long and complicated. We drew on our support at the national office, but authorisation required higher authority. Intermediaries were found, a link with a local NGO had to be made and negotiations continued. I was involved in all the steps but had only a vague understanding of the dynamics that were being played out. My habitus had not shifted sufficiently to participate effectively in this complex field. Sharp hostilities developed during the negotiation process, which eventually affected everyone involved in the pilot. There were distressing moments but ultimately the difficulties we faced strengthened the solidarity of the group and possibly enhanced the work we were doing.

The rationale and structure of the pilot literacy programme which was trialled in 2016, are set out in the following chapter.

## 4. Moving towards Systematisation of Experiences

### Action Research

My initial intention, when applying for doctoral studies, was to do an action research project. Dunne, Pryor and Yates (2010:25) explain that:

Action research assumes that we are engaging in research because we are interested in change for improvement, rather than simply understanding.

Somekh (2006:27) states that action research:

provides a means whereby research can become a systematic intervention, going beyond describing, analysing and theorising social practices to working in partnership with participants to reconstruct and transform their practices.

This hope of working in partnership with adult literacy workers to facilitate change was an important part of my motivation in doing a PhD.

Action research has developed in different ways since the initial work of Kurt Lewin (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009) and there are a variety of models of action research methodology (Koshy, 2010). However, they mainly have a common pattern: a reconnaissance phase to establish the current situation is followed by analysis and the planning of an intervention that aims to improve practice. The intervention is monitored and evaluated for its impact in enabling change (Dunne et al., 2010). After a number of cycles of action, reflection and evaluation, the research is written up and published. However, the cycles of action, reflection and evaluation may continue after the writing up (Somekh, 2006). O'Sullivan (2002), working with primary teachers in Namibia during post-independence education reforms, used action research to develop effective in-service training. This approach seemed particularly relevant to my proposed research.

Prior to starting my doctoral studies in 2013, I had been involved with the municipal adult literacy programme for three years. Details of this work appear in Appendix 2. In 2012, I completed an MA in International Education and Development. Research carried out with the municipal programme for my MA dissertation was intended as the reconnaissance stage of an action research project. The training needs that ALFs identified were summarised as:

- Activities that would make the classes livelier and motivate the learners.
- Techniques focussing on enabling adults to learn and dealing with mixed levels in the class.

- Exchanges between ALFs, including peer observations or micro-teaching exercises at workshops.

The initial intervention in 2013 was a training and support programme offered to the ALFs working for the municipal literacy programme, based on these points. The approach used modelling of learning activities, which were discussed in relation to how ALFs could adapt them for use with their own literacy groups. Opportunities for sharing experiences were included in each of the seven workshops. The programme also offered an introduction to theoretical aspects of adult learning and ALFs were encouraged to reflect on their practice. The plan was that this intervention would be evaluated, and the results would be used to plan a further stage of intervention, thus forming the next cycle of an action research process.

In addition to the training workshops, I undertook collaborative work with individual ALFs and their literacy groups. This work was less structured and more experimental than the workshops. The purpose of the collaborations was to explore in more depth the processes of ALF professional development. It is not possible to evaluate the impact of training workshops without observing classes (McCaffery et al., 2007) and entering into a dialogue with individual ALFs about their understandings of their practice. The collaborations were an attempt to do this through observation of classes and feedback, joint lesson-planning, team-teaching and project work.

However, it became clear that year that a classic action research methodology was not possible. A common model for educational action research is a partnership between practitioners who carry out research in their work contexts and university-based academics who support them (Sanguinetti et al., 2005; Gewirtz et al., 2009; McKim & Wright, 2012). This model works well in schools or other educational institutions, where teachers carrying out the research can meet and share ideas and experiences. However, an action research project with adult literacies instructors in Scotland (St. Clair et al., 2009) ran into difficulties because the instructors, who were on casual contracts, and worked in different locations, were able to meet only in their own time, covering the costs themselves. They did not have access to the resources needed to carry out the work collectively. St Clair et al. argue that effective action research with practitioners has to be properly resourced if it is to act as a form of professional development.

The question of resourcing is obviously relevant to the Guatemalan context where many of the ALFs have difficulty attending meetings because of transport costs and a range of commitments and responsibilities. Like the literacies instructors in Scotland, they are not based in a centre where they can exchange experiences on an ongoing basis. In addition, ALFs have received very little training and many of them are new to the programme; they are not yet well-established as practitioners and would find it difficult to take on the role of action researchers in their literacy groups. While they participated in collaborations, they were not yet participating as researchers. In this sense, the work did not fit the usual model of educational action research. The municipal literacy co-ordinators (MLCs) were also unable to participate in the project as researchers, due to their workload, which included carrying out 20 class visits a month, making difficult journeys to communities outside the town.

## **Narrative Inquiry**

Having resigned myself to the fact that my study would not be an action research project, I still wanted to maintain the collaborative principles and the goal of action for change. I searched for another methodology. Denzin & Lincoln (2003:1) write about the “ruptures, rifts and even revolutions” that occurred in qualitative research in the 1980s. Some of this was about the representation of the researched, how their voices could be heard and how they could shape their stories. They argue that qualitative research is still in a state of flux and that this is an exciting time in social research, with so many methods and approaches available to experiment with.

In a later volume, Denzin and Lincoln (2011:5) suggest that the researcher acts as a bricoleur, using a range of tools, piecing together representations that change as they are constructed:

The interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one’s personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting.

Everything the researcher observes is refracted through the lens of their own biography. People cannot give full accounts of their actions, only accounts or stories that attempt to make sense of them. Researchers tell stories set within certain paradigmatic conventions.

The power relations in the research relationship are complex. Lather and Smithies (1997:154) write about the “spectacle” of research and warn of:

The weight of the indignity of being studied, the violence of objectification required by the academic pursuit of the possession of another's life which is turned into information for academic trade.

Lather (2003) also proposes that research should act as a catalyst for change, rather than just describing the world. She suggests that research participants should develop some self-understanding through the research process or even empowerment.

I came to narrative inquiry through reading about teacher identity. This was where I first encountered the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), which was cited in much other writing on teacher identity (see for example Coldron & Smith, 1999; Beijaard, et al. 2004; Freese, 2006). Barrett (2006:110) distinguishes between narrative research as the "study of texts constructed by informants" and narrative inquiry as practised by Clandinin and Connelly, which she classifies as "a form of knowing," or "story as an ontological metaphor". Both approaches value narrative as an organising principal in our lives. We use narrative to make sense of the complexity of lived experience (Fox, 2006; Riessman, 2008; Tedlock, 2011).

Webster & Mertova (2007:88) credit Clandinin and Connelly as the first to use narrative inquiry as a research method. In this approach, rather than analysing participants' narratives, the research as a whole is conceived as the construction of a narrative and "the stories of participants merge with the researcher's to form new stories that are collaborative in nature"

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) see narrative inquiry as a conversation with participants. The research is "multi-layered and many stranded" (p.xvii):

It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or a series of places and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives (p.20).

Working together with educators in their usual working situation (or landscape) enables the researcher to make sense of what is happening, by getting to know the collaborating educator and observing a context over a period of time. There is an ethnographic element in this process as the researcher observes and works closely with the educator, offering contextual details of the educator's working landscape.

There is a need for constant negotiation and flexibility in the interaction:

one asks questions, collects field notes, derives interpretations and writes a research text that addresses both personal and social issues by looking inward and

outward, and addresses temporal issues by looking not only to the event but to its past and to its future (p.50).

The field notes reflect the shared experience of the collaboration, an interweaving of description and reflection. Capturing the nuances of these experiences is both ambiguous and complex. They are inevitably “selected reconstructions” (p.94), shaped by the relationship between the researcher and the participant, already an interpretation of events.

Clandinin and Connelly’s methodology seemed well suited to my research. The openness of their approach fitted with the view of researcher as bricoleur, using a variety of methods, accepting ambiguity and exploring complexity. The ethnographic aspect of making meaning beyond the description of observed action, by exploring the backgrounds of the ALFs through ongoing dialogue rather than formal interviews, gave the depth that was needed for this research. Using such an ethnographic approach I could search for a deeper understanding of the varied elements in the ALFs’ development, a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of their changing practice. Clandinin and Connelly’s collaborative work with teacher participants seemed close to the collaborations I was developing with ALFs. Their view of narrative as jointly constructed through the process of the collaboration allowed me to imagine how to create a narrative text from my research.

In my research proposal I set the goal of five narratives, constructed through collaborations with ALFs that I would work with over two years. As a part-time student, I was able to spread my fieldwork over three years. In 2014 I began collaborations with five ALFs and continued working with Elisa, whom I had started to work with in 2013. In 2014, Elisa was forced to work as a volunteer because of funding cuts and did not continue in 2015. I wrote the story of our collaboration, translated it into Spanish and shared it with her. A proudly Maya woman, who had represented her workplace at regional cultural festivals, she was interested to read contextual information about the history of Maya elites that I had read up, but she was not aware of. I used Bourdieu’s concept of habitus to analyse some of our different approaches to teaching and she understood and commented on this analysis. I amended the narrative to integrate her comments (Appendix:3).

A second narrative emerged from my work with Antonieta, which started in 2014 and continued in 2015. Antonieta had struggled at school, had not completed secondary



education and was doubtful of her ability to teach. She was glad of the additional support that the collaboration gave her, was open to new ideas and practices and very reflective. She realised that her own negative experience at school had made her more sensitive to the needs of the participants in her group and offered extra support, in her own time, to those who had more difficulties with learning. Antonieta defended her participants against my enthusiastic demands on their ability to go further. After the first year, based on the feedback from the participants in her group, Antonieta understood that despite her initial doubts, she had the ability to teach. The experience had impacted on her self-confidence and her identity and she had become a more self-assured teacher in the second year. My collaboration with Antonieta was a rich learning experience for me (Appendix:3).

Antonieta did not continue to work with CONALFA in 2016 because she was unable to form a group in her area. She was offered a group in another community, but this would entail taking two buses, one into town and another out to the village. The time and the cost were prohibitive. I gave Antonieta the narrative I had written about our two-year collaboration. It was 20 pages long and she did not manage to read it all; reading long narrative texts was not included in her literacy practices. I understood from this that my hoped-for collaboration in the joint construction of a narrative text was misguided. I had not taken into account the literacy practices of the ALFs that I was working with. While Elisa had been able to engage with the written text, Antonieta, who had struggled at school and lacked confidence in her own literacy abilities, found the collaboration in the construction of a written narrative inappropriate. I had chosen the methodology and was imposing it on her. In fact, I had also done so with Elisa. I had to re-think again.

## **Ethical Issues**

Power relations between researched and researcher are more complex where the researcher is a white "westerner" working in the Global South. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999:39) details the injustices committed against Maori people in the name of research:

Research has not been neutral in its objectification of the Other. Objectification is a process of dehumanisation.

and stresses that education and educational research have been particularly problematic:

A very rich history of research which attempts to legitimate views about indigenous people which have been antagonistic and dehumanising. Discussions around the concept of intelligence, on discipline or on factors that contribute to achievement depend heavily upon notions about the other. The organization of school knowledge, the hidden curriculum and the representation of difference in texts and school practices all contain discourses which have serious implications for indigenous students as well as for other minority ethnic groups (p.11).

She argues that there are “values, practices and ways of knowing which continue to inform indigenous pedagogies” (p.14). These include oracy, debate, formal speech making and structured silences. De Souza Santos (2014) points out that the North has been teaching the South for five hundred years and asks whether the North has the ability to learn from the South.

Smith (1999:10) lists important questions to be asked of researchers:

- Whose research is it?
- Who owns it?
- Whose interests does it serve?
- Who will benefit from it?
- Who has designed its questions and framed its scope?
- Who will carry it out?
- Who will write it up?
- How will its results be disseminated? [*bullet points added*]

As a doctoral student arriving from outside Guatemala and proposing a research project, the research is initially mine, but my hope was that it would serve the interests of the ALFs who participate in the research and that they would benefit from it. The research questions were mine although they developed and changed through the process of the research. But was this change in response to the priorities of the ALFs, or my own? The research should be a joint process, carried out collaboratively and the text should be a response to this collaboration. But if the written text is too distant from the literacy practices of the participants, how can it be considered as a collaboration?

Freire (1996a:42) warns that educators coming from a privileged background find it difficult to shed their sense of superiority:

because of their background they believe that they must be the executors of the transformation.

and there is always the danger that this can happen, that I can slip into the role of the foreign expert, who believes they have the capacity to transform, in this case, the way

that literacy is taught. Freire proposes that dialogue can change the relationship between students and teachers:

Through dialogue the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student and students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught, also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow (1996a:61).

## **Systematisation of Experiences**

Prior to my final period of fieldwork in 2016, I spent two weeks on an academic visit with CREFAL, a regional centre for adult education in Latin America, based in Mexico. Here I had the opportunity to access a wide range of writing about adult education in Latin America and to speak to other researchers. It was during this period that I began to understand *Sistematización de Experiencias*. I had already come across the term in Latin American literature but was not clear what it referred to. Now was my chance to question, to read and to learn and as I did so, I realised that this was a methodology well fitted to the work with the pilot literacy project, which was about to become reality.

Systematisation of experiences (SystEx) emerged in Latin America in the 1960s and 70s in the context of popular education. Bustamante (n.d.) also links it to other Latin American theories and practices: participatory action research, liberation theology, popular communication and theatre of the oppressed. SystEx draws on the experiences of participants in a project or programme, in a collective process of reflection and theorisation that generates new knowledge of both the internal dynamics of the programme and an understanding of the wider context in which it is situated. All participants contribute to and learn from the systematization process. They develop ways of sharing what they have learned with groups working on related projects, who might be interested in their experience.

Oscar Jara (1997), one of the best known and most cited writer-practitioners of SystEx, defines it as a rigorous learning exercise which develops a critical understanding of lived experience. It places itself in opposition to positivist methods and uses a dialectic epistemology. Jara states that the purposes of systematisation are:

- to exchange experiences
- for the people involved to understand their own work better
- to develop theoretical knowledge from practice
- to improve practice

and argues that much of popular education is made up of unwritten and unreplicable processes and for this reason it is important to systematise them in order to understand them, extract knowledge and communicate the learning. The conditions, contexts, actions, perceptions, results, relations and reactions should be analysed. We need to:

Take ownership of the lived experience and give an account of it, sharing with others what has been learned\* (1997:19).

SystEx is both a product and a process. It differentiates the constant from the occasional. It clarifies the dead ends and the new paths, uncovers the coherent and incoherent aspects of the project. It explains the trajectory. It is not possible to share an experience without extracting what has been learned from it.

Although Jara asserts that systematisation is neither a research method nor a form of evaluation, over time it has developed in different directions. Tapella & Rodríguez-Bilella (2014:116) define it as:

a multi-stakeholder evaluation tool developed in Latin America that emphasizes in-depth comprehension of processes and shared learning among the participants of development experiences as they unfold.

The difference between SystEx and other forms of evaluation is that an evaluation measures results particularly in relation to objectives, targets, etc. Evaluations are often carried out with an audience of donors or managers in mind. Systematisation is more interested in the dynamics of processes and experiences than of results and is carried out for the benefit of all those involved in a project.

Tapella (2009:25-26) earlier collaborated with Action Aid in Latin America and in a report on their work he points out that interventions do not always happen as planned. SystEx allows us to explore how things really happened "to learn from the curves and bumps on the project road". He goes on to explain:

The story of a project or experience cannot be told by one actor alone, but only by all actors involved [...] Systematisation is a methodology that proposes shared and participatory group dynamics. This implies creating a space where people can share, confront, and discuss opinions based on mutual trust [...] There is no single way of learning but instead there is critical engagement in the interpretation of the experience and mutual and collective learning.

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\* All citations marked with asterisk are my own translation.

Bickel (2005:7), an associate of Jara, discusses the processes of systematisation. She stresses the interaction between personal and collective knowledge and transformation. While taking action for social change, we also achieve personal change, understanding a process by participating in it. Systematisation is a tool that develops our understanding of a process and our place within it. Organising the experiences in a coherent way is important but she warns that a rigid system for doing this may limit the learning process. We need to search for the hidden threads:

There is always a temptation to reinforce what we already knew and to close ourselves against seeing things in a different way and discovering something new.\*

As participants in a systematisation will not agree on everything, it is important that diverse points of view are represented. The learning of those who participate is as important as any final conclusions or the dissemination of these.

Alfonso Torres is a member of a collective at the Colombian National Pedagogic University, who use SystEx in work on memory, identity and the subject, with community organisations. Torres (2010:208) suggests that SystEx developed in response to a crisis in popular education, related to the failure of the orthodox Marxist political movements of the 1960s and 70s. The movement had lost touch with the changes taking place in Latin America and the wider world and there was a lack of dialogue with other critical perspectives; there was a need to acknowledge the diversity of social movements:

This inclusivity took many actors – indigenous people, women, youth, human rights activists, and environmentalists – to report from their experiences that the economical subordination in which society had placed them, was not the only source of social tension nor their only motivation for organizing.

The research group that Torres forms part of, stress the intentionally collective production of knowledge in SystEx. The participants in the process are recognised as active subjects. The processes being analysed are complex so multiple techniques are used to build the narrative from often contradictory fragments. Systematising should lead to an overall reading of the diverse stories, enabling the conceptualisation and theorisation of practices. Publishing the systematisation contributes to the knowledge of a specific social reality.

Messina (2015:19) started to work with SystEx in the 1990s and describes her involvement with the methodology and how this has shaped her own learning. Critical of the survey-based research she was trained in and frustrated by the way that the

research had no impact on the lives of the people she was gathering data about, she found systematisation offered an alternative. She proposes that:

Systematisation seeks to push at the boundaries of knowledge and action, promoting participation as part of a way of being in the world where equality and respect for diversity are integrated.\*

In addition to work with community projects, Messina has carried out extensive research in more formal adult education contexts and with school teachers. She argues that educators can carry out their own systematisation without the involvement of an academic researcher. SystEx emerges from the practice of the educators. It is close to reflective practice but broader and collective:

Systematisation starts from the practice of educators; we refer to making our practice speak, to presenting it to ourselves and others, looking for categories to understand it. However, our approach to practice is theoretical, that is, we approach it from previous knowledge (whether common sense or scientific). Practice in this sense is always loaded with theory. Therefore, we produce knowledge from practice which is already theoretical and contains theory; the task is to make this knowledge explicit\* (2015:27).

Messina stresses the importance of writing in the systematisation process and claims that writing enhances the process of transformation. Raising the issue of the validity of systematisation research, she claims that the resonance of the writing for the reader, evoking their own experience, enabling learning and change, gives the research validity.

In a more recent article written with Jorge Osorio, (Messina & Osorio, 2016) the authors argue that SystEx is in a state of flux and that there is no longer one approach or one way to carry out systematisation; it has become a discipline in itself. An important aspect of this approach is the belief that another world is possible. Messina and Osorio critique current education policy as prescriptive and results-led and stress the importance of focussing on educators' experience. They emphasise the narrative aspect of systematizing experiences and propose that the process of collective generation of knowledge increases the autonomy of educators. We are doing something for ourselves and others, for the collective. Writing includes the voices of others in dialogue with our own. We share the idea and the practice of a better world.

An example of SystEx with specific relevance to my research is a report by Carmen Campero (2005) of a development course, run by the National Pedagogic University, for adult educators working for INEA, the Mexican National Institute for Adult

Education. Campero notes the impact of the politics of education in Mexico at the time, on both the design and the process of the course. The systematisation worked at different levels: with the course participants who then carried out research projects in their work areas and also with the university-based teaching team. The adult educators came from different backgrounds, had different experiences and these were recognised in the design of the course. They were considered actors in the course, not just recipients. The reconstruction of the knowledge and experience brought to the learning process by the participants was a fundamental aspect of the course, in keeping with adult education practice.

While some of the educators initially complained about the apathy and lack of commitment of literacy and basic education learners, the systematisation process enabled them to transform this into an understanding of the effects of poverty. They also discussed the problems of low levels of formal education of the adult literacy facilitators (ALFs) and the limited training they were offered. The educators reported that the research projects they carried out led to a better understanding of the people and communities they were offering services to and improved their relations with the ALFs. Learning to value the ALFs and the learners increased their own self-esteem and valorisation of their work.

Campero concludes that the political situation, the target-oriented approach of INEA and its neglect of the human and social dimension of education creates a conflict with the purpose of the training course. She claims that INEA's programme omits work towards equality or the improvement of the quality of life and argues that adult education should go beyond the compensatory model and work towards inclusion and overcoming poverty.

### **Systematisation of Experiences in my Research**

The experience-based, collective processes of reflection and learning, the recognition of the interaction of the personal and collective, acknowledging the contributions and agency of all participants in the project and the unity of theory and practice, fitted with my existing approaches to adult education and practitioner research and added a holistic methodology, developed in the Latin American popular education context. It became the framework for the pilot literacy project, which took place in 2016, and is the basis of this thesis.

Lenz (2012) points out that the introduction and use of participatory research methods is dependent on the political situation. Referring to the example of Argentina, she shows that participatory research was extremely difficult to practise during the military dictatorship and that such methods were re-introduced only with the return to democracy in 1983.

Within the context of the current structure and ideology of CONALFA, it is not possible to work to a model of popular education. However, the pilot literacy programme did aim to offer a more meaningful context for literacy learning and the development of reflective practice among the ALFs who worked on the programme. Systematisation of experiences of the pilot project could lead to the construction of knowledge about the development of ALF practice through a participatory and collective process. This would require ongoing exchanges among the ALFs and the use of participatory techniques throughout the project. It was also important to collect data that could be accessed by the whole team as part of the process of systematisation. My thesis focusses on this process, based on my final period of fieldwork in 2016. Data collected earlier act as background information and may be referred to where they offer additional insight.

## **Research Questions**

My initial very general research question of: How do adult literacy facilitators working for a municipal adult literacy programme in Guatemala develop their practice? has become three questions with sub questions:

1. What do the ALFs who participate in the pilot literacy programme bring to their work?
  - What prior experiences and values do they bring to their work?
  - How do they understand their role as literacy educators?
  - What is their understanding of adult learning?
2. How are literacy group participants positioned in the adult literacy field?
  - What is the situation of the participants?
  - How do the participants interact with each other and the ALF in the literacy groups?
  - What do participants gain from the pilot programme?
3. What is learned through the process of the pilot programme?
  - How do ALFs engage with new teaching methods and practices?



- How do ALFs articulate their own learning?
- What forms does the collective construction of knowledge take?
- What emerges from the systematisation process?
- How does the context in which they work impact ALFs' practice?

## Research Methods

Research methods reported here refer only to the final year of fieldwork: February-July and October-November 2016, when the pilot literacy project and the systematisation of experiences took place. Research carried out during earlier fieldwork is not included, as it was not integrated in the systematisation of experiences.

Denzin & Lincoln (2011:8) describe the researcher as bricoleur, using a range of tools that are available and suitable to the context, piecing together representations that contribute to an emergent construction, that changes as it is built. Such research is "inherently multi-method" and adds "rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth" to research. In Clandinin & Connelly's narrative inquiry approach, a broad range of data is produced through the interaction between the researcher and the educator to enable a richer basis for interpretation or making sense of the experience. I have drawn on these methods in the work with the individual ALFs, to develop a narrative of our collaborations, within the overall context of the pilot project and the systematisation of experiences. The two methodologies are integrated and complement each other.

Table 1: Research Methods	
Method	Data
Development Workshops with ALFs (10 workshops held fortnightly between March and July 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Session plans and materials</li> <li>• Records of written group work</li> <li>• Recordings of group discussions</li> <li>• Field notes</li> </ul>
Visits to literacy groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation of class</li> <li>• Work with individual participants</li> <li>• Groupwork with participants</li> <li>• Discussion with ALF after class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field notes</li> <li>• Class observation summaries agreed with ALFs</li> <li>• Some audio recorded comments and discussions with participants</li> </ul>
Assignments written by ALFs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 case studies of individual participants</li> <li>• 6 reflections on Unit 1</li> <li>• 6 reflections on Unit 2</li> <li>• 5 final reflections on the pilot programme</li> </ul>
Mid-point Systematisation of Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan and rationale</li> <li>• Photographs of displays and participatory writing</li> <li>• Transcripts of 3 audio-recorded discussions</li> <li>• Records of all written work</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field notes</li> </ul>
Final Systematisation of Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan and materials</li> <li>• Transcripts of 3 short audio-recorded discussions</li> <li>• Records of written group work</li> <li>• Transcripts of ALFS' audio-recorded final statements</li> <li>• Field notes</li> </ul>
Semi-structured Interviews with ALFs & MLC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 Mid-term interviews</li> <li>• 7 End of project interviews</li> <li>• 1 interview with MLC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview transcripts</li> </ul>
5 interviews with literacy group participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview transcripts</li> </ul>

Table 1. summarises the research methods and the data that were generated through each one. Each of the research methods is discussed in more detail later in the chapter in the section on development work with ALFs.

## A Pilot Literacy Programme

In this section I will describe how the pilot programme was implemented and give more details about the research methods.

### Rationale

In 2015, working with the municipal co-ordinator, we prepared a proposal for a pilot literacy programme, which was presented to CONALFA first at departmental and then at national level. We were told that we would be able to run the pilot the following year with up to 10 literacy groups.

The pilot draws its inspiration from Freire's (1996a) promotion of dialogue, which he defines as the naming of the world through an equal exchange. Through the process of what he calls "banking" (p.53) education, the naming is done by the powerful. The experiences of those who are subjected to this form of education are denied and ignored.

Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanising aggression (p.69)

The project attempts to build dialogue and enable moments of naming the world. However, the pilot does not use the methodology that Freire developed for adult literacy work, where the lexical universe of the potential participants is first researched by a team of educators, who then design the materials to be used in the form of a primer. In the pilot programme, the vocabulary emerges from the interests and lived

contexts of the participants in the process. Nor does the pilot programme claim a process of problematisation or political awareness-raising. In the context of the national literacy programme, where literacy education is made equivalent to primary school, when historically a politically-orientated Freirean approach has been rejected, and a local situation exists that would not offer support for such an approach, there was no attempt to introduce this.

The pilot also draws on New Literacy Studies, where literacy is understood as situated social and cultural practices (Street, 1984; Robinson-Pant, 2000; Papen, 2001; Street, 2001). Studies of literacy learning have found that adult literacy classrooms are generally not conducive to developing literacy practices and that people who learn to read and write in contexts relevant to their work or other aspects of their lives do so outside the constraints of literacy learning groups (Rogers & Uddin, 2005; Chopra, 2011).

Many Latin American writers have critiqued the form that adult literacy classes usually take. In an article on literacy and social justice, Sylvia Schmelkes (2008) refers to the culture of silence and points out that participants in literacy classes are rarely given the opportunity to write their own words. She criticises the idea that anyone who can read is able to teach others. Learning the mechanics of phonic decoding is inadequate for engaging with the contextual culture of the written word.

Kalman (2002), working in the New Literacy Studies tradition in Mexico, has described the teaching of literacy in Latin America as rigidly mechanical. The skills that are taught are: the correct formation of the letter, clear pronunciation when reading aloud, development of vocabulary, respect for spelling norms, reciting grammar rules. The skills are developed through isolating the bits of language, presenting them in decontextualized phrases to enable mechanical manipulation, rather than meaningful communication. She argues that while children from backgrounds where reading is part of daily life go through this process as something that has to be suffered, those who come from homes with limited literacy practices, have only this school experience as a resource for learning to read. Literacy learning needs to be seen as much more than an introduction to the letters. It should be the appropriation of communicative practices mediated through the written word.

Verdugo and Raymundo (2009), writing about literacy in relation to indigenous communities in Guatemala, argue that CONALFA's adult literacy programmes

reproduce school culture and do not recognise the existing knowledge of the participants. They argue that:

People need an impetus to start learning by themselves, without making them feel dependent\* (p.189).

And propose that to achieve this:

Methodological rigidity should be substituted by methods which allow the possibility of adapting to the specific demands of the people attending literacy classes and to continually innovate the ways of teaching\* (p.191).

Verdugo & Raymundo claim that CONALFA can be seen as a case study of the lack of political will to support effective literacy education. However, as argued earlier, CONALFA is not a monolithic organisation and within the institution there are varying positions.

As Torres (2009) argues about adult education in Latin America generally, there is a gap between policy and practice. The gestation of the pilot programme was fed by ongoing discussions with the MLC about this gap between the policy of active, participatory classes and the practice of mechanical letter instruction.

CONALFA uses a variety of literacy packages. In the research area, I have observed the use of the Cuban method – *Yo Si Puedo* (Yes I Can) which consists of a series of television programmes; *Madre Tierra* (Mother Earth), a primer which uses generative words to encourage discussion of environmental issues; and ABCDEspañol which takes a whole word approach, using plastic pieces with words and pictures. Yet as these methods are brought into the classroom, they become reduced to teaching letters, as Kalman describes. Usually one letter is presented per lesson, followed by repeated copying of the letter, the syllable family and sometimes words containing the letter, into the participant's notebook. These pages of copied letters or words are known as '*planas*'. (See Appendix:4 for extracts from field notes on observations of classes).

In order to become an ALF, applicants must provide evidence of completing lower secondary school. All teachers bring to their work their own experience of education. The longer and more varied our educational experience, the more we have to draw on in our understanding of teaching and learning and this enables us to develop a broader range of teaching practices. The ALFs mainly draw on the methods by which they themselves were taught to read in primary school. Discussions about environmental or other social issues or whole-word recognition were not part of this experience and so they do not integrate such approaches into their practice.

At the start of the teaching year, ALFs attend training on the method that has been selected for that year. The training offers a step-by-step guide on how to present the content of the primer. At one workshop, the trainer told the ALFs to learn the steps like the *pater noster* and always to follow them religiously. In the end, she told them, it would be automatic. Training then, can promote a rigid approach to teaching, a pre-defined method that does not leave space for creativity, or observation and reflection on the learning processes of the literacy group participants.

At other training sessions, however, I have observed trainers encouraging ALFs to be creative, usually in the context of the production and use of additional materials. The importance of being aware of and respecting the knowledge of adult participants is often stressed. CONALFA documents refer to the participants as subjects of their own learning and claim that attending literacy classes leads to empowerment and participation in community development.

The pilot tries to address some of the issues outlined in the cited critiques. It draws on the tradition of student publishing referred to in the introduction and builds on the experience of introducing and evaluating learning activities and teaching techniques in literacy classes in the municipality since 2013. Some of these rely on my own earlier experiences and practices in adult education, adapted to the local context, while others emerged in response to the specific situation of the municipal literacy programme. Written texts that participants are already familiar with such as street signs, ID cards or school reports are integrated into the literacy programme. The main focus is to present literacy as communicative practice rather than the learning of letters. But phonic skills are also addressed within this context.

### **Structure of Pilot Programme**

The pilot is presented as having a simple process:

Expression through dialogue → Supported writing → Reading.

Three units were put forward in the initial proposal:

1. *Mi grupo* (my group)
2. *Mi familia* (my family)
3. *Mi comunidad* (my community)

This was later extended when the duration of the literacy programme was changed from 5 months in 2015, to 8 months in 2016. A fourth unit was added which would be on a topic chosen by each group and a final revision unit was also included. This

change in the length of the programme was announced after my arrival in Guatemala and I was unable to change my plans and could not stay for the entire eight months of the programme. I returned to the UK at the end of July and came back to Guatemala for the end of the programme in October.

A guide for the ALFs which included activities for each of the units was drafted and distributed. This was updated at the end of each unit based on feedback from ALFs and a joint evaluation. New activities suggested or devised by the ALFs were included in the updated version (Appendix:5). Below I will describe a selection of activities from each unit. In addition to notebooks, literacy group participants received mini whiteboards, made by laminating white paper, and board markers to write on them. Particularly in the early sessions these were used to gain confidence in first attempts at writing before moving on to using pencils to write in notebooks.

### ***Unit 1: My group***

In this unit, literacy group participants learned to write their names and recognise the names of some of the other group participants. They selected the most common letters in their names and attempted to recognise them in other contexts.

Each participant was asked to draw a picture that represented something important in their lives. They shared their pictures in the group and then learned to write the word that the picture represented. A poster (Fig.5) was created with the pictures, words, and the names of the participants and this became a reading text that participants could return to in later classes.

They then moved on to write a simple sentence related to their chosen word. The ALF would



*Figure 5: Significant Words Poster*

They then moved on to write a simple sentence related to their chosen word. The ALF would support them to create a short simple sentence that they would remember and be able to read back and then showed them how to write it. ALFs later collected these sentences and produced them as a printed reading text, which included either the original scanned pictures or appropriate images downloaded from the internet. This was called the 'Significant Words' activity (Fig:6).

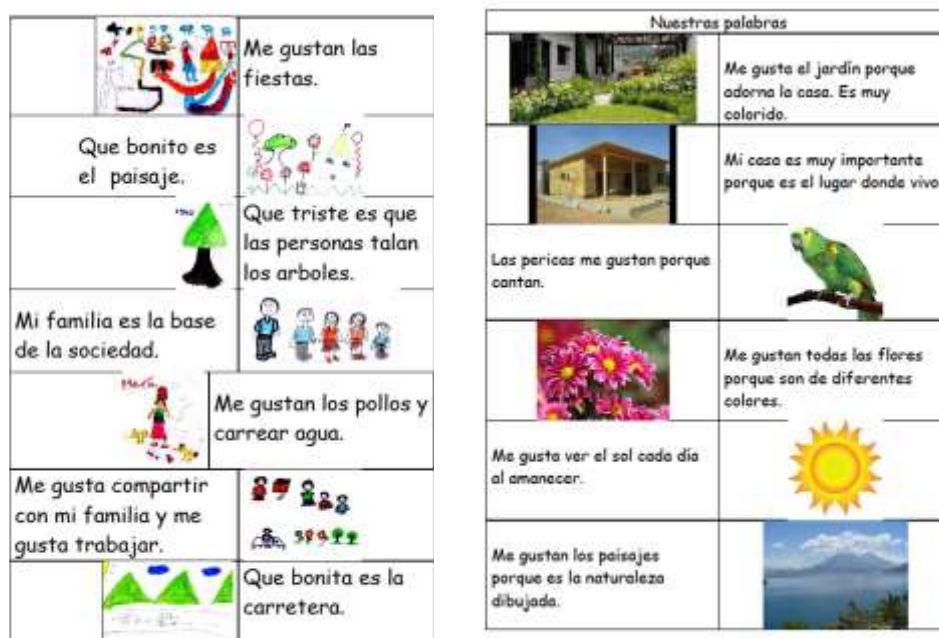


Figure 6: Reading Texts resulting from Significant Words Activity

Another activity which had proved popular with groups in previous years was the 'Album.' Each participant had their photo taken and printed onto a sheet with lines for writing. They either wrote a short text about themselves or worked in pairs to write about each other. This work was then also reproduced as a reading text. Participants received a copy of each reading text, which was stuck into their notebooks and could be read in the classes and also at home.

### **Unit 2: My family**

In the second unit, there were discussions about different forms of families and what the 'family' meant to people in the group. Participants learned to write and recognise the names of their family members. Many of the women were excited about being able to write their children's names. This led to more work on recognising letters from the context of names. Syllable sets were produced and a variety of activities using these were developed by the ALFs.

In this unit, each group produced their own alphabet chart (Fig:7). The ALF brought sheets with the letters of the alphabet



Figure 7: Creating group alphabet

written in order. The group would start with those they recognised the most easily. Participants would suggest words to represent that letter and then the whole group would decide which was the most relevant word for the majority. Moving on to less known letters, they would complete the alphabet chart which would remain on the wall. The ALF then produced a smaller version to be stuck into notebooks.

Participants were encouraged to bring in texts from home such as school reports, electricity bills etc. to examine formats and read key words. ID cards were also studied, and different ways of writing dates were analysed and practised.

The final activity was to write a short text about the family which would also be reproduced as a reading text for each participant.

### ***Unit 3: My community***

In this unit, participants drew maps of the community and labelled key places. Maps displayed on the walls became reading texts. The group went out to read street signs which were photographed and printed as flashcards for use in class (Fig: 8).



*Figure 8: Street texts*

Each group chose a community topic to research. Three groups chose local history, one group worked on environmental issues and two worked on health. One group decided to research why adults in their community did not want to join the literacy programme. Some groups invited speakers, others went out into the community to explore and interview. Each group produced a leaflet on their chosen topic and did a presentation, to which people from the community and the literacy programme were invited.

### ***Unit 4 Groups' selected topics***

Each group chose their own topic for the fourth unit. In one group where one of the women worked as a cook, participants decided to do a cooking project: the cook would teach the others and they would work on writing the recipes. Two groups worked together to share and write up traditional herbal remedies. A group with a mix of



K'iche, Mam and Ladina participants chose culture as their topic, while another explored the value of women. One group chose to take their earlier work on local history further and another to extend their work on health as one of the women was active in the local health commission.

### ***Unit 5 Revision and Assessment***

In the final unit, the groups reviewed previous work and selected a topic to write a final text. Selections were made from all the written texts for submission to the booklet of writing by literacy group participants that would result from the pilot project. Participants also practised the type of activities that would be required in the final assessment.

## **Development Work with Adult Literacy Facilitators**

### ***Workshops***

Ten half-day training and development workshops were held with the ALFs between March and July 2016. Because of the delay in setting up literacy groups and uncertainties about which ALFs would participate in the pilot, only two workshops were held before the start of the programme. The design of the workshops for the pilot programme drew on the experience of running workshops in previous years. ALFs had shown little interest in discussing theoretical issues of adult education and had asked for 'techniques' that they could use with their groups. Guskey (2002:283) argues that teachers look for methods that are related to their teaching contexts and if they find that something works, they will continue to use it. Teachers will not change their views unless they first see something work:

The crucial point is that it is not the professional development *per se*, but the experience of successful implementation that changes teachers' attitudes and beliefs. They believe it works because they have seen it work, and that experience shapes their attitudes and beliefs.

Lave and Wenger (1991:51-52), working in the broader context of adult learning, see the relationship between experience and attitudes and beliefs as more dialectical, arguing that "understanding and experience are in constant interaction" and that learning takes place through social practice rather than instruction. They shift the focus of learning away from the individual to the analysis of learning as participation in the social world. This view of learning as social practice was integral to the training and development workshops. Training was practice-based, drawing on ALFs' existing knowledge and developing ideas through dialogue.

In the first workshop, ALFs learned to write their names in Arabic script, using their non-dominant hand. The intention was to gain insight into the experience of the participants in their literacy groups. Activities proposed in the pilot guide were initially demonstrated, then practised with a discussion of how to transfer them to literacy groups. Later ALFs led activities in the workshops from their reading of the guide. Theoretical aspects of adult learning were introduced through participatory and dialogic activities. At the start of each workshop, time was set aside to share experiences of working with the new activities in the literacy groups, so enabling a mutual learning environment. A summary of the workshops appears in Appendix:6.

### ***Visits to Literacy Groups***

The literacy programme started in early March. Visits to literacy groups were carried out by the MLC and myself. Visits by the MLC were in the format of support and supervision that was offered to all the ALFs working for the municipal programme, not just those working on the pilot. They followed the required CONALFA procedures in which the MLC completed a supervision form which was read and signed by the ALF. As my visits were outside the official requirements, there was more room for flexibility. This was an opportunity for me to observe the ALFs working with the pilot programme, to discuss the work and to offer support. In the information sheets given to the ALFs who joined the pilot programme, I offered the following possibilities for visits to their groups:

- I observe your class and then we discuss it
- I prepare an activity for your group and then we reflect on the result
- We plan a class together and later reflect and comment on it
- We plan and implement a writing project with the group

In my dual role of educator and researcher, the form of the observation presented some problems. Dunne et al. (2005:59) argue that most forms of research include observation, which is not always acknowledged. What actions are 'visible' in the research process depend on the researcher's identity and perspective. The participant observer is at one end of the observation spectrum:

an agent in the events under study [...] who transforms them into data through the medium of fieldnotes or a reflective journal.

Dunne et al. point out the specific difficulties in practitioner research where the researcher makes ad hoc decisions about the balance of action and observation in the interests of generating the richest data. They also note that the identity of the

researcher is interpreted by the research participants and this will influence action. In working with the ALFs over a period of time, our understandings of each other's identities changed. The balance between observation and action varied during the visits, so also impacting on the recording of data. Notes while observing were rich with detail. However, when I worked directly with literacy group participants, I wrote notes later from memory.

On my first visit to each group, I observed and took notes. The main focus of the observation was to see how the ALFs were using the activities recommended in the pilot programme and how the literacy group participants were learning with them. I was bringing to this role previous experiences of observing adult literacy and ESOL classes as a co-ordinator, manager or trainee inspector in the UK. In that context I would write extensive notes, which I would later draw on to write feedback under the headings mandated by the particular institution I was working for. In the research role, I wrote detailed notes, marking points that I identified as useful for discussion with the ALF, to enable them to reflect on and develop their practice.

During the fourth workshop, using a list of what not to do in literacy classes produced by the Ministry of Education in Ecuador as a starting point (Appendix:7), we debated and agreed criteria of good practice. This then became an evaluation check list, which ALFs were able to use to reflect on their classes (Appendix:8). We started to use this as a format for evaluating the class together. We listed the activities, then agreed strengths and areas for improvement. This was kept as a record for each of the ALFs working on the pilot.

We started the project with seven groups. Another ALF, Miriam, requested to join the project three weeks after the start, as she felt that the standard CONALFA method she was following was not working and she wanted to see what the pilot project had to offer. Sadly, she had to withdraw a month later due to complications in pregnancy. She was replaced by a new ALF, who stayed till July and then left to train as a missionary. Seven groups completed the programme. Visits to groups took place approximately fortnightly, though there was a longer gap over the Easter period. Some visits did not go ahead because classes were cancelled or other problems occurred. Two groups met in one venue and the ALFs worked together and supported each other. Discussions after these visits were held with both ALFs together. See Appendix:9 for a record of the visits.

### ***Production of materials***

Times were agreed when ALFs came to the municipal office, where they could use the computer, scanner, colour printer, and laminator to prepare materials. Internet access was also sporadically available.

While the production of posters was an existing practice among ALFs working for the municipal programme, the reading sheets, created from participant writing, were a new concept and ALFs responded in different ways to this process. Materials are often produced as a final product for display rather than as a text for use in developing reading practice and some ALFs delayed the work of materials production in the early stages of the programme, needing additional support to ensure that reading texts were made available to the literacy group participants. ALFs had differing experiences of using computers and those who were more proficient were able to support those with less confidence. The work was time-consuming, particularly in the early stages as ALFs were learning to use the available technology and working out how to design their materials. Occasionally there were tensions over access to the computer or the printer, while at other times there was supportive collaboration for example in the process of laminating.

### ***Assignments written by ALFs***

ALFs received notebooks to be used as reflective journals. However, it soon became apparent that regular journal writing did not form part of their usual literacy practices and was therefore not adopted. Instead ALFs were asked to do more focussed reflective writing at specific points in the process. Writing an assignment was a more familiar practice and these were generally completed as requested.

There were four assignments:

1. Evaluation of Unit 1
2. Evaluation of Unit 2
3. Case study of one literacy group participant
4. Final reflection on the pilot project

The completed assignments were shared at workshops. First ALFs read their work to the group and there was a discussion. Later the assignments were collated into one document, distributed to the ALF team and commented on again. This gave the ALFs the opportunity to engage further with each others' ideas and work towards a

collective construction of pedagogic knowledge. (See Appendix:10 for examples of the written assignments).

### **Systematisation workshops**

The team held two systematisation workshops. The first was held in July before my departure. The final workshop took place in November after my return. Details of the workshops are presented in Chapter 7.

### **Booklet of Participant Writing**

All groups submitted participants' writing for the booklet to be published at the end of the project. Four of the ALFs participated in the selection of texts and the editing of the booklet. The booklet was presented at the closing ceremony for the end of the programme. (See Appendix:11 for selections from the booklet).

### **Interviews**

Interviews with the ALFs were only one of the methods for generating data. The interviews were an opportunity to gather together a variety of thoughts and ideas that had emerged in fleeting form in conversations and discussions during the course of the pilot programme. They also offered an opportunity to fill in the gaps, to ask questions about issues that had not emerged through the process of the programme. I also interviewed the MLC, whose position in relation to the pilot project was very different to the ALFs. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and audio-recorded. Interviews varied in length between 20 and 45 minutes (See Appendix:12 for interview schedules).

Critiquing positivist and what she identifies as "masculine" (p.244) approaches to interviewing, Oakley (2003) argues that in feminist research practice, interviewing women is an opportunity for "documenting women's own accounts of their lives" (p.253) and that the interview should offer some benefit to the interviewee. Dunne et al. (2005:33) stress the unequal power relationships in the interview process, which the researcher needs to be aware of, noting that the "sensitivity and empathy of the researcher are highly significant to the outcomes." The identity of the interviewer, as understood by the interviewee will influence responses.

In his last major work, Bourdieu (1999) led a research project using in-depth interviews with people living in marginalised communities in the Paris region. He emphasises the problems of intrusion and distortion in the interview relationship and

the need for the interviewer to be aware of how these impact on the conversation. The interviewers on the research project were people who already had contacts with the interviewees or came from similar backgrounds and held some shared assumptions. Using “active and methodical listening” (p.608) they attempted to position themselves “in the place the interviewees occupy in social space” (p.613) taking on their problems and questioning them from that space, so increasing the speaker’s sense of legitimacy. In simple terms, interviewers acknowledged what they heard, showed interest, offered agreement and engaged in conversation.

In conducting the semi-structured interviews with the ALFs, I tried to place myself within their social space as a literacy practitioner, with certain shared assumptions about literacy education in their context, acknowledging the impositions of the national literacy programme. The first set of interviews were carried out in June and July, the fourth and fifth month of the pilot programme, by which time the ALFs had developed clearer ideas about my identity and we had established a certain level of trust. The interviews sought to enable ALFs to reflect on what had been learned in the process of the pilot literacy programme and to state these in their own way. I followed a set of questions but was able to use prompts and follow up questions adapted to the specific situation of each of the ALFs. I carried out final interviews with ALFs in October and November and was able to interview all those who had stayed to the end of the project.

Interviews with literacy group participants were arranged with support from the ALFs. I audio recorded interviews with five participants individually at the end of the programme. These were unstructured, as the questions varied according to what I already knew of each of the participants and issues that were specific to their context. Extracts from these (in Spanish) are available in Appendix:13. I also recorded group discussions in two literacy groups.

## **Analysis and Presentation of Data**

As Dunne et al. point out (2005), data analysis starts during fieldwork; this is particularly the case when using SystEx. The pilot programme team held two systematisation workshops to reflect on how the project had developed and what had been learned. Data analysis is an iterative process between the fieldwork experience and theoretical constructs. Dunne et al. (2005:86) also note that in making sense of the fieldwork experience, the researcher’s position impacts on how the data is

analysed. What is found is “a product of the process” and the writing of the research report is “an act of power”.

In starting the study, I was addressing a gap in research about the educational practices and development of adult literacy facilitators. My focus in selecting and organising the data was the developing practice of the ALFs working on the pilot project. The systematisation of experiences was an important aspect of the collective process but in addition I wanted to present the personal development of each of the ALFs. To do this, I have retained aspects of Clandinin and Connolly’s (2000:17) narrative inquiry approach, a “multi-layered and many stranded” conversation. As in my earlier narrative work with Elisa and Antonieta (Appendix:3), it was important to share my analysis with the ALFs, ask for their feedback and present their comments.

Messina & Osorio (2017) argue that the writing of research must include the voices of others in dialogue with our own; not an idealised narrative but an account of questioning with multiple voices, expressing ideas emerging from experience. This is what I have attempted to do. However, I could not avoid the problematics of the representation of other people’s lives.

All interviews with ALFs were conducted in and transcribed in Spanish. Transcribing them myself, I was familiar with the context and so felt able to interpret the meanings and punctuate the text to facilitate the reading. Laughter and other sounds as well as long pauses were noted in brackets. Omissions, where something was not understood, were indicated. Of course, the idiosyncrasies of oral language are lost in the transcript: pace and rhythm, pronunciation and intonation, gesture and other aspects of body language (Bourdieu, 1999), but knowing the speakers, I could recreate some of this as I read the transcripts. Interviews with literacy group participants, where pronunciations varied from standard Guatemalan Spanish, were adjusted to the standard form. Syntactic variations were transcribed as spoken.

Group discussions during the systematisation workshops were transcribed in a similar way, with speakers named on the basis of recognition of their voices and speaking styles. Group discussions recorded in literacy groups were summarised. Some group discussions in workshops were logged by time and topics and later certain sections which were particularly relevant were transcribed more precisely.

In selecting excerpts from interviews with ALFs and from their assignments I have chosen those which highlight the insights that the ALFs brought to or developed through the process, and which are most clearly expressed. When reporting spoken contributions, I have preferred to summarise and paraphrase oral language that is less focussed and more repetitive. In translation, I work to transfer meaning rather than attempt to reproduce the linguistic style of the speaker.

In translating comments from interviews with the literacy group participants, I have stayed close to the way they expressed themselves, maintaining the flow of oral expression. I have added punctuation with the intention of making the meaning more accessible. When translating the comments of Maya women who spoke non-standard forms of Spanish, particularly in the use of tenses, I initially tried to reproduce these forms in the English. However, I realised that this was a distraction and could not capture for the reader the way that they spoke Spanish.

I have presented the data in three chapters. Chapter 5 follows the narrative inquiry approach, outlined above, to create stories of the collaboration and the developing practices of the individual ALFs. Data for each ALF was collated from fieldnotes, interviews and assignments and further engagement with the data continued in the writing of each narrative. I have used Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of capital and habitus to analyse the positions of the ALFs in relation to the adult literacy field and how they engaged with the pilot literacy programme. Each of the narratives was shared with the ALFs during my final visit to Guatemala in April 2018. Their corrections have been integrated into the texts and their responses are reported in the final chapter.

The second data discussion (Chapter 6) focusses on the literacy group participants. The field notes from literacy group visits recorded literacy events and interactions between the participants, the ALF and myself. The ALFs wrote a case study of one of the participants in their group and at the end of the project I interviewed some of the participants who I had worked with during the course of the pilot project. In making sense of these data I selected twelve participants whose stories were "telling" examples of the situations of participants in adult literacy classes (Mitchell, 1984, cited in Street, 2017:4).

The third data discussion chapter deals with the systematisation process. In the first section, exchanges and social interactions that generated learning in training and



development workshops, are analysed and the development of more extended collaborative learning is presented. I also reflect on my own practice as an educator. The second part reports on the first systematization workshop, highlighting the reflections and theorisation that emerged. In the third section I draw on statements made by ALFs at the final systematization to record both the personal and collective development that took place through the project.

## 5. ALFS: Capital and Habitus

### Introduction

Clandinin et al (2009) point out that as teachers we are always in a process of becoming while Wenger (1998) sees all learning as change and becoming in the context of the communities that we participate in. Through participation in the pilot literacy project, the ALFs, the MLC and I were all in a process of becoming. While participating in a collaborative project in which new knowledge is constructed collectively, personal development and learning will also take place (Bickel, 2005). In this chapter I focus on the personal development and learning of each of the ALFs.

People come to teaching or adult education with developed ideas of what teaching is about, based on their own experience of education. All new teachers bring this knowledge from their own experience of schooling. Akyeampong and Stephens (2002) propose that the teacher training process must explore, acknowledge and engage with trainee teachers' perceptions of teaching in order to modify them and develop a less rigid model. Pryor et al. (2012:420) argue that:

Teacher education programmes need to engage with the knowledge that trainees come with, to exploit it where it is useful and appropriate and to challenge it where it is not.

Change is not easy and is often resisted (Messina & Enriquez, 2003; Avalos, 2011). However, many adult educators have a strong sense of commitment to their work (Galvan, 2008; Rodríguez Moncada, 2009) and it is important to value the experience and local knowledge that they bring (Messina, 2005).

In a study based in six African countries, Pryor et al. (2012) show that in CPD programmes, teachers are more likely to look for practical ideas to include in their repertoire of activities and methods, rather than rethinking their practice in terms of student learning. Avalos (2011:10) warns that professional development strategies that work well in one context are not necessarily relevant to teachers working in different contexts. Teachers' prior beliefs and cultural contexts impact on their response to new initiatives. It is important to take account of the "history and traditions of groups of teachers". There is a constant need to continue to research, experiment and reflect in teacher development.

In working with a group of teachers (or ALFs in my case), it is important to bear in mind the complex lives and social networks that they participate in. People define themselves through multiple relationships, function across diverse networks outside the research project and bring to any situation, aspects of other parts of their lives (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mace, 1992; Ruiz Muñoz, 2004; Lave, 2012):

*What learners learn [...] is imbricated in, and takes meaning from, its part in social relations between learners' multiple contexts and subsumed in learners' identities (Martire & Lave, 2016:262)*

In this chapter I draw on field notes from visits to literacy groups, interviews with ALFs and their written assignments (see Appendices:4,10,12 for examples) to construct a portrait of each of the ALFs who participated in the pilot project. I try to paint a picture of the person, beyond their participation in the project, identifying their positions in Guatemalan society, and discussing their support networks and other activities. I present their stories of how they came to literacy education and what this meant for them, showing the experiences, ideas and values they brought to the work. Through descriptions of some of the sessions with their literacy groups which I observed or participated in, I offer glimpses of how their practice developed. I include ethnographic details to present the situated context of the work of the literacy groups. Drawing on conversations reported in fieldnotes and ALFs' written assignments, I present some of their responses to the pilot project. In crafting these portraits, I use the approach of narrative inquiry developed in an earlier phase of my research. (See Appendix:3).

As with these earlier narratives, I shared what I had written with the ALFs working on the pilot project, asking for their comments and corrections. This was done after completion of the draft thesis during a short visit to Guatemala in April 2018. I have incorporated their corrections into the texts below. However, as these conversations were held nearly 18 months after completion of the project, I have included these discussions in the final chapter.

This chapter addresses my first research question: What do the ALFs who participate in the pilot programme bring to their work? This is broken down as follows:

- What prior experiences and values do they bring to their work?
- How do they understand their role as literacy educators?
- What is their understanding of adult learning?

I also address part of the second question: What is learned through the process of the pilot programme? in particular

- How do ALFs engage with new teaching methods and practices?
- How do ALFs articulate their own learning?

A theory of learning as social practice is implicit in these narratives. I also use Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus to make sense of the data. Each of the ALFs brings different forms of capital to the work and a habitus shaped by their previous experiences and engagement with education. In the interactions with the ALFs, my own habitus, also shaped through my previous work in adult education and my position on the edges of the adult literacy field in Guatemala, becomes apparent. I attempt to explore reflexively how my dispositions impact on the dialogue we are engaging in.

Our intention for the pilot programme had been that the ALFs would have at least one year's experience with CONALFA. Nine of the ALFs that had worked for CONALFA the previous year were interested but found it difficult to set up groups. ALFs are responsible for recruiting people for literacy groups in their communities but there was a great deal of difficulty in finding participants in 2016. The Ministry of Social Development had in previous years run programmes where cash transfers were paid to the poorest families and women receiving these payments were encouraged to attend literacy classes. After a change of government in 2015, the cash transfers were stopped and ALFs trying to recruit participants reported that women were saying that the cuts in benefits meant that they had to find other sources of income and so had less time for study.

That year I became involved in the process of setting up literacy learning groups for the first time. With the MLC and the ALFs we attended municipal meetings, visited health centres, spoke to community leaders locally and even went door-knocking. However, despite all the efforts, only two of the nine ALFs managed to form viable groups. We were therefore obliged to find new people with no prior experience to join the pilot project. Three additional ALFs were recruited during the period of registration and two more joined the pilot at the first meeting of the municipal ALF team. All the ALFs were young women between the ages of 19 and 26 and all the adult literacy group participants were women.

The minimum requirement to become an ALF is completion of nine years of schooling: six years of primary and three years of *Básico* (lower secondary education). After *Básico*, students make a choice to study for two years to complete *Bachillerato*<sup>9</sup>, or choose a vocational option, which also leads to *Bachillerato* but takes three years. This second is a popular choice for young people from working class or indigenous backgrounds who are less likely to attend university. The seven ALFs who eventually joined the pilot had all completed a vocational programme. One was a nurse; three had qualified as primary teachers, and one as a pre-school teacher; one had studied business administration and one had completed secretarial studies.

In visiting the literacy groups, I did not impose a particular form of collaboration but waited to see how interactions emerged. The way that the class visits developed was different in each group, as I tried to respond to the specific situation and offer support in a form that worked for each ALF. It was an exploratory process.

## **Mariana**

Mariana came to meet me at the bus stop on my first visit and walked me down the hill, across a bridge over a foul-smelling stream, and welcomed me to her “humble community”. She apologised for the fact that she had not been able to get the key to the school where her group was meeting. I met the group outside the school and after a brief chat, they left. I took the opportunity to talk to Mariana who I already knew from last year. Although I hadn’t worked with her group, she had attended all the workshops I was involved in. It had been her first year and she said she had felt like a novice, and like a sponge, was soaking up any ideas she could find. She had used the ideas from the workshops in her classes and said that these had helped to keep the participants motivated.

Mariana is Mam.<sup>10</sup> Her grandparents had a small coffee farm and the family also worked the harvest season on the big coffee plantations on the coast. They moved to the town in search of better opportunities when she was a child, but it was not easy to find regular employment. Her father migrated to the USA when she was 13. He found work in a factory soon after arriving and was able to send remittances to support the

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<sup>9</sup> Secondary school completion certificate that allows university entrance

<sup>10</sup> Second largest Maya group in Guatemala

family. It took five years to pay the approximate \$12,000 debt to the *coyote*<sup>11</sup> but now, with his remittances, the family are comfortably off. As an undocumented migrant he cannot come to visit his family, but he maintains contact.

Mariana studied *magisterio*<sup>12</sup> which until 2014 was a vocational option at secondary school. She is therefore a qualified primary teacher but has not been able to get a job as there are no vacancies in the town and travelling to a rural school is too difficult. Working with CONALFA gives her the opportunity to practise her profession and to gain valuable experience. She recognises that the participants bring their own ideas to the group and she tells me that it's important not to be arrogant about the knowledge that you have. The more you know, the more humility you must show. Mariana is an evangelical Christian and told me she learned humility from God. She has also learned from her parents and elders in the community. She wants to understand life and asks herself what kind of person she would like to be. Mariana is studying part-time at the university to upgrade her qualifications. She is the only one of her siblings who has continued her studies at this level; her two younger sisters are both married with a child. In my final meeting with Mariana in 2018, she told me that her father is proud of her for studying and working and not getting married at a young age.

During one of the pilot training workshops, Mariana questioned me in a puzzled voice, saying she didn't understand how we can start at the end and then go back to the beginning. For her, the beginning is the letters: the vowels and the consonants, their names and their order in the alphabet. This was how she had learned at school. This was how she had been taught to teach. She could not accept that it was possible to start with whole words, with names, and discover the letters within the context. This refusal was evident in the first of her sessions that I observed.

Mariana asked one of the participants to lead a prayer to start the class. Then she told the group that they were going to identify vowels. She explained that a consonant is not a vowel and gave some examples. She told them that they had to be clear what the difference is. She asked the beginners in the group to approach the board and write up the vowels in their names while the more advanced learners were asked to

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<sup>11</sup> People smuggler. The coyote arranges the journey, links with other people smugglers including the risky border crossing. People find trustworthy coyotes through recommendations locally.

<sup>12</sup> Primary teacher training

write the consonants in their names. Then Mariana wrote all their names on the board and asked them to copy the letters that they recognised. Everyone engaged in this but what appeared on the board was a random jumble of letters. Mariana then wrote the whole alphabet out on the board and saying the letters one by one asked the participants to identify which of the names on the board each letter appeared in. Those who could already read a little managed to do this, but the beginners were lost. Then Mariana asked them all to recite the alphabet which again the beginners could not do. She chided them for being too quiet and asked them to repeat more loudly.

She suggested that when they went home, they should consider what they had studied today: the vowels. They should repeat them in their mind and that way they would memorise them. When you write a word, she told them, you will be confronted by vowels and consonants. It is important to recognise the vowels and the consonants in order to write a word. She told them that the order of the alphabet was really important and continued to try and drill it with them.

When we sat down to discuss the class, Mariana's greatest concern was that when she wrote the alphabet on the board, she had omitted the 'e'. I was more concerned that she had not used any of the learning activities from the pilot programme and that for the whole session, explanation was her main teaching strategy. I asked her who had spoken most, and she named the participants one by one. I told her that it was herself. She looked at me in bewilderment. I tried to explain that we needed to focus more on supporting learning rather than teaching through explanation. And caught myself doing exactly that with her – explaining. I changed tack. In the training workshop we had used the Arabic alphabet to model the first activities of the pilot programme, to give the ALFs the experience of learning to read and write an unknown script as adults. I asked her if she thought it would have been useful if I had written out the whole Arabic alphabet at the start and she recognised that this would be confusing.

Mariana looked crushed by my criticism of her session and I was disappointed by what I had observed. She was not working with the pilot methodology but rather with one that was familiar to her, that she had not only experienced as a child but one that she had been trained in and seen in action during her teaching practice. How could it be wrong? This was the *doxa*.

Bourdieu uses the term *doxa* to mean the adherence to the relations of order; the acceptance of certain situations as self-evident. It is the undiscussed, undisputed, unanimous view:

... doxa as an uncontested acceptance of the daily lifeworld [...] the most absolute form of conservatism. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:73-74)

Some writers have suggested that trained teachers may find it harder to adapt to participatory methods, as they consider their training to have equipped them to teach literacy to adults (Torres, 1993; Archer & Cottingham, 1996; Galván, 2008). Kalman (2002:21) explains the approach:

For years we have been trying to find the way to get letters into the heads of young people and adults without worrying about finding out how reading and writing are introduced into their world.\*

Getting letters into people's heads is the *doxa* of literacy teaching. Would Mariana be able to question it? To try out something different?

At the next visit, Mariana told me she was going to work on syllables. She continued to understand literacy as the learning of letters. The group had brought in packaging which contained words such as: *mamá, rosa, gato, música, foto, zapato* (mother, rose, cat, music, photo, shoe) and had worked with these. Today Mariana made word cards and the group actively engaged in recognising the words. Mariana introduced this activity by telling them "we have learned some new consonants with the packaging." She cut the cards up into syllables and the participants collaborated to put the words back together.

When the group had left, I asked Mariana what she felt was the main difference between today's session and the previous one I had observed. "You have to prepare," she told me. "I found it difficult to use the technique. Now I have caught up." Later she explained that she had become confused because of using a different method last year. She had not understood that the pilot would move so far from the traditional way of teaching. She had expected that like last year, she would follow the method that she was used to, adding some optional activities. I asked what had enabled her to make a change and she indicated it was the feedback I had given her after the previous session.

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\* all citations marked with asterisk are my own translation



Mariana's educational *habitus* developed during her twelve years of schooling is one of paying attention to and analysing what is expected and needed. Coming from an indigenous migrant family, living in precarious economic conditions, she brought no recognised cultural or social capital to the education field. Her strategy is to observe what is required, to 'guess what's in teacher's head,' to make every effort to conform to expectations. She appears to approach learning not as a desire for comprehensive understanding but to "display knowledge for evaluation" (Lave and Wenger, 1991:112). Now she is using this same strategy with me. She has processed my criticisms from the last visit and is working to meet my expectations.

Mariana was later visited by CONALFA inspectors, who were critical of the pilot programme and of her work: there was not enough writing in the participants' notebooks, some letters were badly formed, errors had not been corrected. Mariana was devastated by the experience; she had received positive feedback at inspection the previous year. She shared her feelings with the other ALFs who showed their support and were angry on her behalf. It later emerged that this incident was a key moment for some of the team members. They were angry that one of their *compañeras*<sup>13</sup> had been treated in this way and interpreted it as an attack on all of them. It strengthened the emerging sense of a group purpose and identity, an identity shaped in opposition and resistance to the powerful position of the inspectors.

At the final systematisation workshop, the ALFs anonymously described each other with three adjectives. Mariana was described as: cheerful, affectionate, kind, friendly, sensitive, reserved, hard-working, responsible, enthusiastic, dedicated and showing solidarity. In her final reflection on the pilot process Mariana wrote that this experience was important to her and that the descriptions were:

Something that I never imagined that they would think about me.

Coming to the field with limited capital, struggling to create a position for herself, Mariana was supported by the solidarity in the group and it was this aspect of the pilot that offered the possibility of personal development.

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<sup>13</sup> Compañera can be translated in different ways according to the context: colleague, comrade, companions, class-mate, team member. It implies a sense of solidarity

## Alejandra

Alejandra was the other ALF who was in her second year with CONALFA. She had also enthusiastically attended the workshops last year and always had a question or comment. Yet she had never intended to work in education; her vocational option was business administration. Alejandra is married with two children; her husband is a tennis coach, who once played in Guatemala's youth team and they live with his parents. She became an ALF because she heard they were looking for somebody to teach literacy in her neighbourhood and it was an opportunity to work. She had been at home for two or three years and was willing to take any job that was on offer. The experience awoke something she had not expected:

I discovered an area of my life that I had not discovered before which was teaching other people and I liked it because it is lovely to teach someone to learn to read and write and that this will stay with them for all their life.

She explained that it was hard work, but she learned to be patient and realised that people learn in different ways. She found herself getting involved with the participants, becoming friends. Long after the official teaching period was over, some of the women were still coming to her house to learn more.

Alejandra is the only one of the pilot ALFs who is Ladina and comes from a more secure economic background. She attended a private school and enjoyed doing presentations in class through which, she said, she developed confidence in public speaking. Also an evangelical Christian, she is active in her church, and religion is a central force in her life. At 26 she is the oldest of the ALFs. With her confidence, optimism and ability to make people laugh, she took a leadership role in the group. Listening back to recorded group discussions, I find that laughter nearly always follows from one of her jokes. She told me that she joined the pilot project because she likes to learn new things and was curious to know how people would learn with a method that had not been used before.

Having signed up to join the pilot, she needed to get a group and was very persistent in doing this. In addition to the meetings with community leaders in town, we visited health centres in outlying communities where women were queuing up for consultations with volunteer student doctors from the USA. At one of these, a number of women expressed an interest in joining a literacy group and this is where Alejandra eventually started to work.

When visiting her group, I would meet Alejandra at the bus stop near her home and we would catch a minibus to the community. The group was hosted by Irma, an active woman who under the Ministry of Social Affairs cash transfer programme had been a *Madre Guía* (Guide Mother), an unpaid role where she was expected to encourage the women receiving the benefits to attend training sessions and literacy classes. The group met in a basic shelter that Irma's husband had constructed outside their house: a zinc roof supported by a concrete wall on one side and wooden poles at the corners. The MLC had arranged for space at the local school, but the women said it was too far to walk and they preferred to meet here. There was a table and crates to sit on, and some rough benches were added later. Alejandra had been given a whiteboard by CONALFA and managed to bring it on the minibus and hang it on the wall.

During my first visit the group were working on the Significant Words activity. The participants had already selected something important in their lives, drawn a picture and talked about it to the others in the group. Now they were going to make a poster with the pictures and the words. Alejandra asked them to present their words and pictures again, and then to introduce each other. They did this and then wrote their names on the pictures and worked together to stick them onto a poster sheet. Alejandra proposed a title which was agreed, and I suggested that the women themselves write the title on the sheet. They practised on their mini whiteboards and when they had got it right, two of them copied a part each onto the poster. Alejandra asked them to do a presentation about the poster and the two women who had written the title consulted with the others and then talked about what the poster meant. One of the other participants commented that they had decided together what to say.

After the class we walked back to the main road where Alejandra's husband would pick her up on his motorbike. One of the reasons that she had felt able to work in this community was that her husband worked not far from there and meeting him after the session made her feel safer coming home in the evening. We talked about the session as we walked. I had liked the way the women had worked together and there was a supportive atmosphere in the group.

Alejandra was described by the pilot *compañeras* as honest, affectionate and aware of others; spontaneous, funny and a joker. They also called her analytical, precise and creative and recognised her punctuality. In further observations I also noted that Alejandra was affectionate and supportive with the participants. I saw her listen to

and comfort women who were upset about something that had happened outside the group and she was able to maintain a light-hearted atmosphere with her good humour and jokes. She told me that the affection and compassion she felt for her participants was linked to her Christian faith.

Alejandra reflected on her work, comparing the pilot programme with the method she had been using the previous year. She pointed out that the primer that they had used last year had things that the participants were not interested in and that they had found the repetition of letters tedious. This year they had enjoyed learning their own and one another's names from the beginning. She started to observe how the participants in her group responded to activities and what worked for them and she quickly picked up the pairwork and groupwork techniques that were introduced in the workshops.

She told me that her son had been very unhappy in his pre-school but had now moved to a primary school where things were going much better. She observed what his new teacher was doing and why this worked for him. She drew on these observations in thinking about her own teaching. Alejandra discussed her literacy work with her mother-in-law and her sister who is a schoolteacher. Her sister told her that she was being trained as an adult educator and that she should value the training that she was receiving through the pilot. Alejandra commented that the workshops had led her to consider returning to study. Having specialised in business administration at secondary level, she had previously assumed that she would continue in this direction. Working in adult literacy and developing close relationships with the participants had led her to realise that she wanted to move in a different direction. She was now considering a career in teaching or social work.

Alejandra's relative economic security and her private education had given her confidence as well as the ability to reflect and analyse. The economic and cultural capitals that she had accrued enabled her to place herself in a leadership position in the group. She valued the training she undertook through the project in economic terms, telling the other ALFs that it would cost a lot of money if they wanted to do it privately, indicating an understanding of the potential conversion of cultural capital acquired through the programme into economic capital. She demonstrated her commitment to the acquisition of new knowledge by always being the first to arrive,

making notes and asking for clarification during the workshops, taking assignments seriously and handing them in on time.

After the first systematisation workshop, it was agreed that the ALFs would present the work they had been doing on the pilot to those in the municipality who had been following CONALFA's previous package. Each of them presented a different part of the work and Alejandra was selected to do the overall introduction to the pilot programme. She prepared thoroughly, revising the handouts and notes from the workshops in a methodical way and she spoke confidently, giving a clear and detailed explanation of how the pilot project was working.

When the programme finished, Alejandra's literacy group met for a farewell event. There were speeches and food to share and the participants gave Alejandra a present to say thank you. She was in tears, and as we left told me that she would miss them all.

### **Dayana and Gabriela**

Dayana had found out about CONALFA from an advertisement offering work as literacy teachers to anyone who could set up a group. Having completed secondary school, she met the requirements and thought that teaching *primero primaria* (the first year of primary school) would be easy. She persuaded her sister-in-law, Gabriela to join her. Both had completed vocational options at secondary school. Dayana was a nurse and had worked in a hospital but gave up her job during a difficult pregnancy and was now at home with the baby. She needed work as she and her husband had fallen into debt. As a nurse, she had sometimes visited women at home to give injections and she felt that this experience would be useful when visiting potential literacy group participants which was a necessary though unpaid part of the work.

Gabriela had trained as a pre-school teacher and had done her teaching practice with four to six-year olds. She was interested in working in adult literacy as this was in the education field. Her training had introduced her to educational concepts, had given her experience in planning a session and thinking about the competencies that would be achieved and this was also relevant for working with adults. She said that children loved being given stickers and stars for good work and that she had been discussing with Dayana the possibility of motivating literacy students by giving them prizes. In this way she demonstrated her understanding of behaviourist approaches to teaching and her assumption that methods used with children would also be appropriate for

adults. Gabriela also had a young child. She and Dayana were both planning to bring their children to the classes.

They hoped that literacy education would help people better themselves. Dayana wanted to help people in her community to emerge from ignorance. She wanted to overcome the negative naming of 'people from the mountain' as illiterate and ignorant. Gabriela and Dayana live in a K'iche village and identify as Mayas although they do not speak or understand K'iche.

After a great deal of effort visiting prospective participants in their homes, Dayana and Gabriela recruited enough people for two groups. The local school offered them the use of a classroom and after a couple of weeks arranged for them to use an empty room where they could keep their materials and put up displays of work. They decided to join their groups together and support each other in the teaching. Dayana had the key to the schoolroom and came early. She would start the session with the participants who came on time, joined later by Gabriela. If either of their children needed attention, they were able to withdraw and leave the other to continue the work.

Gabriela as the more experienced took the lead. She assumed that the training and development workshops would reinforce what she had already learned through her training. She was interested in the idea of using contexts for learning that were relevant to participants' lives and wondered if this would encourage people to learn. After the initial workshops she and Dayana both felt confident and ready to start but later laughingly told me that they had run through nearly all the activities of the first unit in the first session and then wondered what they would do the next day. This was because there were participants in their groups who were already fluent readers, so they raced through the initial activities.

The *compañeras* described Dayana as patient, calm, tolerant, observant and reflective as well as warm, friendly, hard-working and punctual. Gabriela was considered intelligent, well organised, hard-working, responsible and analytical. She was also described as optimistic, respectful and pleasant. But they were also seen as the most creative members of the team.

On my first visit to their groups after they had moved to their own room, I was impressed by the displays and the materials they had made. The participants' name

badges had been put on lanyards that Gabriela's husband had obtained from his workplace and they were hung neatly in a row. As each participant came in, they selected their own name badge and put it on.



Figure 9: Posters created by literacy group participants

On another wall was a poster where participants had written what they wanted to learn and one with all their names. There was a set of posters with the significant words that the participants had chosen and the pictures they had drawn to illustrate them (Figure 9). On a table was a pile of large cardboard dice with numbers that Gabriela and Dayana had made. On further visits more displays and materials appeared and there was no doubt that Gabriela and Dayana were the stars of material-making. I saw in all this creativity the influence of the early years classroom. And Dayana and Gabriela admitted that when the participants said they did not know how to draw, they would draw images for them that the women could copy. Gabriela was reproducing the expectations of the pre-school classroom, where children are taught how to draw.

Unlike Mariana and Alejandra, Dayana and Gabriela did not know me before the start of the programme and it took time to build trust. On my first visit, everyone was clearly wary of me. Much later Dayana told me that her mother-in-law who was a participant in the group had called me the 'angry *gringa*,' while Gabriela said that the fact that I was taking notes throughout had made her nervous:

And I said Oh, what is Marta writing? Because you were always looking, observing and writing and writing. And that makes you nervous. Because you say: what is she writing about me?

The MLC was also there for the visit mentioned above. At the end she spoke to the participants, praising them for their learning and commenting on the mutual support in the group. She told them that last year there was a certificate ceremony at the University and that they needed to persist so that they could also go to the university to get their certificates. She acknowledged the problems that might stop them from

coming to class and then joked about rubber boots and umbrellas for the rainy season. She explained that the ALFs don't earn much and that they are doing the work out of commitment to the community, that it is the participants who benefit.

We sat down together at the end to discuss the class. Gabriela appeared to be weighing up the power relations between the MLC and me. She looked carefully from one to the other but addressed her comments mainly to the MLC. Gabriela was new to CONALFA and unfamiliar with the situation. She was observing and assessing the field and considering her options. She soon began to gain confidence in the group. During one of the workshops, Gabriela made the point that she thought that when I came to visit the classes I should support the ALFs more. She mentioned that the MLC supported them by motivating the participants.

I was not able to deliver these kinds of speeches, it was not part of my *habitus*. I did not accept that telling people to come to classes would motivate them. I did not believe that if they completed the literacy course, they would be able to read legal documents before signing them or that gaining basic literacy skills would change their lives. These were the common contents of 'motivational' speeches.

I offered instead to support them by leading activities. One afternoon, we went out to read and take photos of street signs which were then printed as flashcards. This gave me the opportunity to talk to the women in a more informal way. As we interacted and got to know each other, the wariness wore away. Dayana pointed out that my work with the group built trust with both the participants and themselves. She also found it useful to observe me leading activities with the group although she suggested that it would have been even more useful if I had included them in leading the activity.

Gabriela usually took charge, explaining what to do and organising the participants. Dayana moved around supporting individual learners. Eventually I said I would like to observe Dayana leading a class. This was around Mother's Day and so they made this the theme of the session. They were working on the family unit and as participants came in, they worked on reading and writing their children's names. The more confident people read off their children's complete names with no difficulty and then moved on to try and write the names of one another's children. Doña V. who was a beginner had written only the first names of each of her children in her notebook and she was able to read them fluently. Gabriela asked her if she could write them again without looking and she did so slowly, painstakingly with a little help from Gabriela.



The women working in a group, asked each other when they were not sure or addressed questions to the ALFs. There was a collaborative atmosphere in the work.

They ended with a song about mothers and asked the women to share their ideas about what it meant to be a mother and what they did to celebrate Mother's Day. The women then wrote down their ideas and worked together to create a poster with their writing and pictures. Although this activity was not in the pilot programme, they had taken the ideas from another training workshop and used them contextually with the group. Dayana led the class in introducing each activity, but Gabriela would take over at moments.

Discussing the process of the pilot towards the end of the programme, Dayana explained that she had not really understood what the pilot programme was about and that she found it difficult all the way through. But she felt supported by the *compañeras* "because each one of them had their own potential and they shared it." She had talked to her husband about it all and with her mother-in-law being part of the group there were a lot of discussions about the pilot at home. She liked the participatory and creative aspects of the programme and also enjoyed getting to know the women in the literacy group. She had learned many things from their experience and recognised that people learn in different ways. Finally, she was pleased with the results as nearly all the women passed the final assessment.

Gabriela's background in education gave her a greater confidence. She told me that she had observed classes in primary school and was able to make a comparison between the traditional method of teaching literacy to children and what we were attempting to do with the pilot. She understood that adults and children do not learn in the same way. She had also not found it easy at the beginning but felt that the support she received enabled her to get to grips with the approach and eventually it became easier. Gabriela expresses herself fluently in writing and concluded her final reflection like this:

Having contact with people with so much knowledge, as my participants have, I learned to be patient, tolerant, know how to listen, know how to speak because I was very reserved and troubled but sharing with the women helped me to change: my character, my way of expressing myself and to become more aware of what was happening in my community, to be more conscious, to not feel shy of expressing my thoughts. As I had motivated the

participants to not feel ashamed how could I not give myself the same challenge<sup>14</sup>

Gabriela had come a long way from her initial suggestion of giving prizes to participants to encourage them. As a young person from a Maya village who had completed secondary school, she embodied a high level of cultural capital in the village context and this perhaps made her feel a little separate from the women in her community who had not attended school. But through working with the women, entering into dialogue and listening to them as they expressed their views, she had come to see them not as women who needed to be rescued from ignorance but as independent thinkers with important knowledge which was different from her own.

Yet Dayana and Gabriela both decided that they would not continue with CONALFA. The demands made on them, particularly in terms of the constant need to visit the participants to encourage them to attend regularly was time consuming. Every time an inspection was announced, they were asked to make sure that all the participants would be present, yet only once did inspectors come to their group. They were also angry about how Mariana had been treated by the inspectors.

Having lost a few participants over the course of the programme, their pay decreased. This made the work less financially viable. The workshops and the journey to the centre of town took time, and there was the paperwork. They wanted the best for the participants in their groups and they had invested much of their own time in the work.

Dayana explained:

More than anything it was like voluntary community work and giving our time. So it was something really lovely and [...] I would continue, but if I was well established economically. [...] I can't complain about my husband's salary but sometimes there are debts that have to be met. So with one of you working, it's not enough. You both have to work and with what you earn in CONALFA, well...

This comment demonstrates the position of the ALFs within CONALFA. They are neither valued nor nurtured but treated as dispensable human resources. And so, resisting this exploitation, the majority move on. What little has been invested in them is lost, and the possibility of creating a community of practice where new ALFs would

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<sup>14</sup>Extracts from ALFs' assignments are formatted in the same way as their interviews. See Appendix:10 for examples of ALFs' written assignments

be absorbed into an existing dynamic learning culture, moving from observation at the periphery to action at the centre is lost.

## Gloria

Gloria lives in one of the outlying Maya K'iche communities but had agreed to teach a group in another village further out. Gloria would be traveling to the village by bus and told me I could get the bus at the terminal and she would get on later at her village.

Gloria had studied *magisterio*, and then continued her studies at university. She had completed two years of pedagogy which qualified her to teach in lower secondary school and she had some experience of teaching young people. She explained that she decided to work in adult literacy because there are many people who want to learn and sometimes they are forgotten because they live far away. She told me that she had briefly worked as an ALF before. Her sister had worked for CONALFA and then became ill and died. Gloria took over her group. I was shocked at the news of her sister's death. I didn't understand what she had died of; Gloria explained that she had been taken to hospital and died there. I suspected that her death was linked to poverty or inadequate health care. Gloria also talked to me about racism and that she felt discriminated against because she wore *corte*<sup>15</sup>.

Public transport in Guatemala mainly consists of decommissioned school buses from North America with rigid seats and no suspension. The journey to the village was an hour on a steep and winding road which became a mud track further along. During the rainy season the bus was sometimes cancelled. On one occasion when the MLC was visiting, she and Gloria had to get a ride on the back of a pickup truck. Other times Gloria had to walk part of the way home.

The group met in a school that was badly in need of repair. The classroom they used contained an assortment of mismatched chairs and desks and a very large whiteboard. Gloria pulled a few chairs and desks into a rough semi-circle in front of the board. Three teenage girls came in and she asked to see their homework: pages of *planas*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The traditional skirt worn by Maya women

<sup>16</sup> *Planas* are the main strategy for teaching writing in primary schools. The teacher writes a letter or a word at the top of the student's notebook page and the student copies the same all the way to the bottom of the page.

One of them had been copying her four names<sup>17</sup> but when asked to read them, she said she couldn't. Did she not know that she had been copying her names? Or did she think that since she could not sound out the letters, there was no point in stating the names? Gloria asked her what the letters were, and she was unable to say. Another of the girls was trying to sound out words that I recognised from last year's teaching package: *mamá, papá, pipa*. The group had received a set of primers from last year and had been working with these.

Gloria made a formal start by writing words on the board and asking the participants to name the letters. She stood in front of the whiteboard and used an authoritative teacher voice, asking "testing" questions rather than "helping" questions (Torrance & Pryor, 2001). I watched the girls trying to guess the answers. Then she told them to copy a word into their notebooks, assigning one word to each. There followed a number of activities. In this sense the lesson was well-planned, and the three girls followed and played along. They were being performed into schoolchildren.

On the bus back Gloria asked me about using the primer and I explained that she shouldn't have received copies. The participants like them, she told me, and they want to use them. I reminded her that it was important to work with words that they themselves selected. I suggested that they could use the primers for homework instead of *planas*. I asked what she thought of the class and she replied that her work was good, but she lacked authority as the girls sometimes laughed rather than doing what she asked them. I said I felt she had too much authority and pointed out that there were different ways of asking questions. She was disappointed that so few of the women had come. When adult women were there, the atmosphere was different.

A few more women were there on my next visit. Several brought children with them who were restless and noisy, and it was difficult to work. There was a level of chaos in this group that I have not seen elsewhere. A worker from a local NGO had told me that they had given up working in this community as it had been too difficult. In addition to extreme poverty, there were many social problems, including high levels of alcohol abuse.

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<sup>17</sup> In Spanish-speaking countries people have two surnames: paternal and maternal and two fore-names are also common. In Guatemala I found that people often introduced themselves with all four names.

Gloria led the whole group in choral reading from *Mi Palabra Escrita*, a booklet of student writing we had produced the previous year. They were reading short texts that women had written about each other. Gloria asked comprehension questions at the end in her teacher voice and a young woman who had come for the first time that day and was a fluent reader, answered them. I asked for some comments on the texts. What did they think about these women? What kind of people were they? Did they have anything in common with them? These passages always elicited interested responses from readers who recognised the women as being like them in some way. But no one had anything to say. The choral 'reading' had not allowed them to access the meaning.

When the group came on to writing about themselves some time later, Gloria observed that they became engaged in the process. But her approach to helping them with producing the texts was to write them out and allow them to copy. She did not encourage them to work it out for themselves. Copying into their notebooks, some participants wrote the words across the top of the page for later copying as *planas*. If the sentence did not fit on one line, it was not completed.

During our conversations on the bus, Gloria expressed her doubts about how much the participants were learning. She was worried that they were unruly and not focussed. I was concerned that her way of working, while demonstrating the ability to plan a class and carry through a set of activities, was not using the pilot methodology. Her approach was modelled on school. Gloria commented that she had been taught in a certain way and she felt that everyone had to learn to read like that. She was pleased with participants' progress in letter formation.

Her educational habitus was shaped not only by her own experience of this form of schooling but also her years of study to become a teacher. She performed the teacher role through her implicit knowledge of how a teacher should act (Eraut, 2000). Gloria was the only one of the ALFs who had studied at university, so gaining a higher level of cultural capital. However, on the pilot programme, this capital was not recognised or valued, as traditional teaching methods were being questioned. In resisting the pilot method, she was also resisting the loss of capital.

Gloria was less engaged in the pilot team than the other ALFs. She missed three of the ten workshops and often came late. Although she said she found the workshops useful, she did not get close to the other ALFs. Gloria said it was difficult as she did

not know most of them at the start and she had some complicated history with two that she knew from another context. She felt that they overcame this awkwardness by the end, but she did not feel supported by the group. Avalos and Flores (2017) suggest that teachers who view education as the transmission of knowledge are less likely to work collaboratively. Whether Gloria's distance from the group originated in her difficulties with collaborative work or whether the awkwardness she felt at the beginning created a barrier that impacted on her attendance and involvement is an open question.

I only managed one interview with Gloria, in November. She had had time to reflect on the pilot and was able to express the educational ideas and practices that she brought to the work. She told me that during her studies she had been interested in constructivist education. I asked her what she understood by this. She explained:

So that it doesn't stay at the level of well I know how to write flower but that they have to construct knowledge beyond that it is a flower. A flower is a plant and to construct this knowledge what we have to do is say well a flower is a plant but also a flower means a lot in people's lives.

I suggested that the women already had knowledge about flowers, particularly as the village specialised in growing flowers.

They have this but sadly they think that going to school is to say a flower is a plant and that's it. But it is also necessary to construct this knowledge and tell them that this plant means a lot to people. Why? Because if you are given a flower you feel happy [...] and if you plant flowers, it helps you every day in your survival because it is what they grow.

She wanted to combine her existing understanding of good teaching with ideas from the pilot project.

I realised that we could add something more. Not just we are going to make name badges and this is how we are going to do it. That's fine but we could also [...] talk about it, say "what do you think a name badge is? Do you know about name badges?" We did it in the way that you showed us. But I realised that we could also add something more, that we shouldn't stop there.

Gloria was sharing with me her interpretation of constructivist education based on her understanding of the university lectures she had attended. She was demonstrating her cultural capital as a qualified teacher with some experience of teaching young people. She had been asked to take on the literacy class in the remote village by friends who respected her as an experienced teacher. The conversation was an expression of the parity between us. She did not consider my knowledge and experience of more value

than her own. I had brought my own ideas to the work, but I could not really understand the local situation and did not value the tried and tested literacy teaching practices that she and others had learned through.

The chasm between our understandings of literacy education was vast. Through the process of the class visits and the always incomplete dialogues on the bus, we had shared our concerns about the group. She asked me for advice and appeared to respect my opinion and yet I always felt inadequate in making suggestions, partly because for me the schoolified nature of the classes was the problem but also the difficult situation in the village was beyond my previous experience.

Gloria and I both expressed our sense of failure. She said the participants in her group had not learned much and about half did not pass the assessment at the end. I felt that I had not been able to support her with this challenging work but also that she had not made the changes in her practice that the pilot was aiming at. In a parallel way I could say she had also not learned much. She said she had moved from treating participants as children to treating them as adults, but she had not been able to give up on the *planas*, because, she said, the participants demanded them.

At the end of the interview I asked her if she would like to make any suggestions about how I could improve my work for the future. She responded that I should be stricter, that I had never said anything when she came late to workshops, so she didn't make the effort to come on time. I needed to be more demanding "because if they don't make demands on us from above, then we don't do much"

These ideas are a product of the hierarchies in CONALFA and more generally in educational institutions in Guatemala. Discourses that claim that without pressure people will not fulfil their responsibilities are common. I have already explained in Chapter 3 how my wish for attendance at training workshops to be voluntary was overruled. I was told that if there was no obligation, nobody would come. Such norms are examples of symbolic violence. Gloria both exercises symbolic violence over the participants in her group through her traditional authoritarian approach to teaching and expects to be subjected to the same level of domination in her own role as a learner.

## **Yezme**

Our last opportunity to recruit new members for the pilot was at a training session of the full municipal ALF team. On this day, the MLC announced that we were still

looking for a few people to join the pilot and it was at this stage that Yezme came forward. Yezme had also studied *magisterio* and was now continuing her studies at university but studying law rather than pedagogy. We talked as we waited for her participants, on the day of my first visit to her group. "Knowing the law is fundamental," she told me. "The development of the country depends on it." She wanted to work in adult literacy "to collaborate with my country for development." She was interested in politics, criticising the wealth and nepotism of the ruling elites and the suffering of indigenous people.

She showed me one of the participants' notebooks which contained a number of rather random sentences. I asked where these had come from and she explained that they had been working on certain letters and the sentences emerged from those letters. I said this was the wrong way round. We were not working the traditional way of starting with letters, going on to syllables and then to words and sentences. We were starting with expression. The participants need to write what is meaningful to them.

Only two women came to the class that day, Liliana and Elsa. It was Liliana's notebook I had been looking at. In the classroom I saw that Liliana's picture from the Significant Words activity was on the wall and she had written *vida y bienestar* (life and wellbeing). Yezme asked her to elaborate on this and she explained that this meant to have the most important things: life, health, money because we need money for our daily consumption. Elsa then talked about her religious beliefs. Yezme asked Liliana to draw another picture and then to write something about wellbeing. When Liliana finished, while Elsa was completing her text, Yezme brought over a newspaper and asked Liliana if she could recognise any letters.

The two women read each other's texts and then Yezme announced that we see letters everywhere, including street signs, and that reading gives us information. She asked them to select a few words from each other's text and write some sentences using those words. This led to more of what I later called "example" sentences: "rain falls from the sky," "the apple is tasty" although Liliana's were a little more experience based: I go to market and pay with money.

Yezme had been nervous at first but soon relaxed and after the participants had left, we had a good discussion about the class. We noted that when writing the texts, both the women had not structured them into sentences using grammar or punctuation. Yet they were able to produce a sentence when asked to write a single one. We talked



about how to integrate the understanding of a sentence into the writing of a text. I asked if she understood what I meant by an “example” sentence rather than expressive writing and she did. However, in later classes there were more instances of asking participants to construct a sentence in response to individual words.

Yezme recognised these contradictions in her evaluation of the first unit:

To adapt a methodology which is completely different to the one that I am accustomed to is difficult because every time I try to do it, I can't get it quite right since there are parameters which one methodology establishes which the other pays no attention to.

She told me that when studying to be a teacher, only one approach to literacy teaching was ever presented. For each letter there would be a word. The children would learn to associate the letter with the word and memorise the letters in this way. *Planas* were to learn the shaping of letters. This was the way she was expected to teach, and it was difficult to change the pattern.

She had had one teacher who had inspired her, who had told the students to be open, to search, to find new knowledge. They needed to educate themselves and not be content with what they had been given. If they didn't search, they would not learn, if they didn't investigate, they would always stay in the same place. Dare to be different, she had told them. Yezme was also influenced by her grandfather who shared a similar philosophy, encouraging her to go beyond what she had. By searching, you become rich, not in economic terms but in terms of knowledge, he told her.

Yezme was enthusiastic about the pilot and was always willing to share experiences and ideas. In describing her, the other ALFs called her responsible. They also said she was intelligent, analytical, articulate and studious as well as enthusiastic, idealistic, optimistic and committed. She was also described as collaborative, hardworking and persevering; cheerful, friendly and sympathetic.

She spoke about how hard it had been to adapt at the beginning, but she didn't want to give up. She came to recognise the knowledge that the participants in her group brought and argued that adult learners should be treated with respect and given the space to express their own ideas and use their existing knowledge. She had managed to make this change in her teaching approach and she claimed the participants themselves had changed their mentality, no longer believing that attending adult literacy classes put them in the position of children. However, during a visit in which they were focussing on the community, I noticed that they had put up the names of

shops and services that existed in the community on the wall. Yezme asked: "What do we go to the carpenter for?" "What does the butcher sell?" questions that were more appropriate for a class of children.

The topics that the group chose for their projects were the environment and women's rights. I asked Yezme if she had suggested them. Yes, she had, and the women had then chosen them. She argued that women in Guatemala were rarely given the space to speak and express their ideas and through working on the topic of women's rights, the participants had stated that they had developed new concepts, changed their views and increased their self-esteem. She was proud of this achievement which she claimed had happened through the sharing of knowledge, rather than through teaching. She had learned a lot from her participants.

She recognised the importance of dialogue and came to criticise teachers who put themselves first, who think they know it all, who explain but never listen. She described them in her final reflection:

Small minds who believe they know it all because they have a certain educational level that others don't have, think that because of this they can decide, express their opinions and impose what they think.

She had started to observe how people learn in different ways, that they learned most through their own efforts, but she thought she had more to learn in terms of finding the best way to help them to build further on what they already knew, to become a facilitator of their learning. In her final reflection on the pilot process she concluded eloquently:

Today I can say with pride but with humility that I have learned a lot, that I have got rid of some bad practices and have filled myself with other good practices which allow me to grow as a person, as a sensitive human being, open to change and ready to face the obstacles that life brings us. The process was not easy but here we are, going forward and proof of this is the booklet [of student writing] in which appear the written thoughts as simple as they are deep. To some this will seem normal while for each of those writers it is an achievement which fills not only them with joy and satisfaction, but all of us who participated in this project. We all came out winning. It wasn't easy, but we did it.

The political awareness, that Yezme brought to the work, her analysis of racism against indigenous people, her understanding of women's oppression, and the openness to new ideas that she had taken from her grandfather and one of her teachers, made her readily responsive to the dialogic and egalitarian approach of the

pilot programme. However, while criticising arrogant teachers who consider themselves superior because of their acquired formal knowledge, she was not always able to undo the embodied habitus of the primary teacher. Her awareness of this contradiction and her recognition of the difficulty in making the change, demonstrate her ability to reflect and to work towards the changes that she identifies as necessary.

## **Andrea**

Andrea had trained as a secretary but had never worked in this role. As she pointed out, there are hundreds of people gaining this qualification every year and very few jobs. She had worked as a community health worker which entailed weighing and measuring babies and administering oral vaccinations and vitamins. She also gave advice on family planning. The work included home visits and she had been shocked by the malnutrition that she had seen and also by a case of tuberculosis. The health centre was run by an NGO but after a few months the ministry closed it down and centralised the services, so she lost her job. The work led her to a deeper understanding of her community:

I think what we were doing helped a lot and [...] I think it was there that I learned to love the community because you do it for the community and not for yourself.

She saw the link between this work and literacy teaching when she realised that there were mothers who could not understand their children's growth charts and she wanted to teach them some of what she herself knew.

I liked the idea of teaching other people a little of what I know as I think that we always have something to learn [...] I was happy that I would be teaching older people because not everyone has had the opportunity to study or they didn't have the chance to study as children so it makes me happy to know that I can do something for somebody who although they are older, they can still learn.

At nineteen, Andrea is the youngest of the ALFs and was a little unsure of herself at first. She lives with her mother who runs a shop selling stationery and phone credit top ups. Her older sister is married and active in the local community development committee and the health commission. Andrea is described by her *compañeras* as quiet and modest but also as creative, ingenious and innovative. She is easy-going, generous and a good collaborator.

Andrea's community is on the edge of town although it was once a rural area, with lands held by a wealthy K'iche family. There are still fields nearby where people can

get casual work and there are a number of migrants from other parts of the country in the area. Andrea's group met in a little room with a *pila*<sup>18</sup> in the middle. There were two tables squeezed into the space beside the *pila*. On my first visit to the class, a group of Mam women, who had moved to the area only recently, came in together wearing exquisite *güipiles*<sup>19</sup>. One of them spoke hardly any Spanish and her daughter interpreted for her. They sat at one of the tables and the other women who arrived later sat at the other. Andrea quickly got everybody drawing pictures and writing. The women explained their pictures and why they were important to them. They also worked on their own names, cutting them into syllables and reconstructing them and then those who were more confident worked with each other's names and tried to write them without looking.

After they left, we used the self-assessment sheet to evaluate the class and agreed that there had been a good atmosphere in the group, that the participants worked well together and that they were engaged in the work. We also agreed that it was important to make sure that everyone was working at an appropriate level.

On the next visit Andrea did some work on mathematics, including asking the participants to count grains of corn out loud. Although the pilot does not address the teaching of mathematics, it is included in the literacy programme and ALFs follow the mathematics package provided by CONALFA and/or work with their own ideas. I commented that this activity was rather infantile and that the women could no doubt count and some could do complicated mental calculations. What they needed to learn was the writing of numbers, and setting out formal calculations, not counting. Andrea seemed upset by my comment and I worried that I had jeopardised what had started as a promising collaboration. But she later said that it was important to accept criticism and acknowledge the mistakes that we make.

Andrea did not usually write a plan for her sessions and as I often arrived before the participants, we started planning together. We agreed the activities and who would lead which section. Andrea valued this way of working and later suggested we should

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<sup>18</sup> A structure built from concrete for washing clothes. It contains a deep tub with a tap and beside it a scrubbing board. Water is taken from the tub with a small bowl and poured onto the clothes on the scrubbing board.

<sup>19</sup> Hand woven and elaborately embroidered blouses worn by Maya women

have done this from the beginning. She appeared to gain from the visits what I had hoped that they would offer:

I like the visits very much. You share ideas with us, ideas which we don't always have ourselves or we have these ideas in a different way. [...] I think it is a really good way to support us. At first perhaps we weren't sure of each other but now, yes, we are sure.

The relationships within Andrea's group also changed. Where once the Mam women sat at one table and the others at another, they later mingled more. The older Mam woman, Valeria, who at first would only come with her daughter, came alone when her daughter was not able to attend. The women supported each other. There was one particular occasion when Valeria, whose Spanish had improved over the time she was coming, was trying to read a short text she had written about her family. The others in the group stopped what they were doing to listen and watch. I could sense them willing her to get it right and when she managed, they broke into spontaneous applause. They were always careful to include her in discussions, in spite of her limited Spanish.

The collaborative learning in the group was something that Andrea became aware of and valued:

I have realised that they like learning because it's an interesting way of learning for the women and in this way, they can support each other to continue learning more.

and she gave examples of problems that the women shared and how they offered advice and support to each other.

Commenting on what she had learned, Andrea showed her ability to reflect on her own learning:

What I liked very much was that I became aware of what I was doing, if what I was doing was good or not, if I was following the process or not. It was good to learn that an adult should not be treated like a child. I liked that a lot because perhaps at the beginning I made a mistake in that but later I learned that that's not right and I had to change this, and I did change it.

She said she had gained something new in every workshop and commented that we never stop learning. Andrea observed that the participants responded well to the pilot programme because it was relevant to their lives and they learned through the process of expressive writing:

You can really see that they are learning, and they are interested in learning to write a text that is important for them and especially if it is about them.

During my return stay in Guatemala in October-November 2016, I didn't manage to interview Andrea until the final evening, after the certificate presentation. This time her comments on what she had learned stressed the collaborative process.

I have learned that people learn in different ways, they learn by sharing and not hiding things and not through selfishness or envy. I believe that through sharing we learn better and I have also learned that if somebody can't do it, I can help them. [...] I mustn't be selfish with knowledge and I have to share.

## Reflections

Each of these young women brought their own unique combination of capitals: economic, cultural and social to the field of adult literacy in Guatemala and the pilot programme through which they participated in it. They also brought their educational practices gained as students, as trainee teachers, in community health or church-based social roles. The MLC and I also brought our capitals and educational practices to the work of the pilot. As we collaborated, engaging with one another's ideas and ways of working, we used our positions to put forward our agendas: selecting, resisting, arguing, persuading. Through the process of the pilot programme each of us developed our ideas and practices. The ALFs reflected on their work in different ways and gained new knowledge through their developing practice.

Mariana managed to change some aspects of her practice, introducing activities that she initially found counterintuitive. She also developed her self-confidence through the support of the other ALFs in the team. Alejandra through her systematic approach to study gained new ideas. Having worked the previous year with CONALFA she was able to make comparisons between the methods and analyse the value of the dialogic, contextualised approach. She had developed reflective practice based on observing how her participants learn. Through working with them, she had realised that she would like to continue in this line of work. Dayana, in combining her group with Gabriela's saw herself as an apprentice, supporting individual women rather than leading activities with the main group. She was most concerned about the women who were struggling with learning and constantly sought ways of working with them that would support them to move forward, showing an ability to explore and experiment. Gabriela was able to build on her existing experience of education, adapting her approach and learning to value the knowledge of the participants, while

still maintaining aspects of practice that were clearly anchored in her training as a pre-school teacher. She was able to analyse and express her learning and development. Gloria tried to merge her prior knowledge and experience of education with activities from the pilot programme, assessing the results within the theoretical frameworks that she had developed. She resisted aspects of the project which did not fit with her understandings of learning theory, yet she was able to make some changes and introduce dialogic moments into her work. Yezme, in trying to embrace change, was aware of how difficult this is. She analysed the experience from political and developmental perspectives, valuing what the pilot process offered the participants in literacy groups. Andrea, drawing on her community development experiences, rapidly captured the democratic intentions of the project. Working with the participants in her group from a position of solidarity, rather than authority or condescension, she developed a comprehensive understanding of the importance of collaboration in learning, through her practice.

Each of the ALFs live their lives in complex networks of which their work with the pilot was only a part. Each brought their identities and cultural and social practices to the project, their educational experience being part of this. Despite the difficulties of shifting their educational habitus, shaped in a rigid, limiting system, they made changes. Collaborative work can lead to powerful instances of personal development and these stories are testimony of the process of becoming.

I will return to collaborative learning and collective construction of knowledge in Chapter 7. In the next chapter I will examine the positions and experiences of the participants in the literacy groups and how they engaged with the pilot project.

## 6. Participants: Empowerment or Doxa?

### Introduction

Many claims are made about the value of literacy. The Education for All (EFA) declaration states:

The vital role literacy plays in lifelong learning, sustainable livelihoods, good health, active citizenship and the improved quality of life for individuals, communities and societies must be more widely recognized (WEF, 2000:16).

Literacy is presented as fundamental to all forms of development and is particularly linked to discourses of women's empowerment. This is a recurring theme in much writing about women's literacy programmes. In the 2006 Global Monitoring Report which focussed on literacy we find several references to the positive impact:

The literacy of women and girls is of crucial importance to the issue of gender inequality... literacy contributes positively to women's empowerment, in terms of self-esteem, economic independence and social emancipation (UNESCO, 2006:31).

The recent third General Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) published by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning states:

Education is vital for human rights and dignity, and is a force for empowerment. Educating women also has powerful impacts on families and on children's education, influencing economic development, health and civic engagement across society (UNESCO, 2016:8).

These discourses of the value of literacy education as developing democratic values, improving health and empowering people are not new. Similar claims have been made since UNESCO started working on literacy in the 1950s. Yet there have been many critiques of this rather simplistic link between literacy, well-being and human development and the implication of causality. Researchers working in the tradition of New Literacy Studies (NLS) have uncovered some of the problems. Chopra (2004) shows how the construct of "illiterate woman" as ignorant, dirty and undernourished is learned and reproduced by women attending literacy classes yet when challenged by an 'illiterate' woman who does not accept this view of herself they are able to resist the stereotype. In another situation, (Chopra, 2011) a woman drops out of a literacy class as it is not offering what she expected. She needs to read the labels on the agricultural products she is using but this is not part of the literacy curriculum. Robinson-Pant (2000) observed women in literacy classes in Nepal ignoring the health messages that were being promoted while women participating in the national literacy



programme in Namibia argued that they were all aware of the health practices promoted in literacy classes (Papen, 2001). Robinson-Pant (2001) observed women claiming to have achieved measures of empowerment for an evaluation questionnaire and then laughing about their claims once the manager carrying out the evaluation had left.

In the literacy classes I observed during my years in Guatemala, I did not find many activities that could be interpreted as empowering. On the contrary, I generally found the participants disempowered and subjected to *symbolic violence*. Seated in rows in a primary classroom, asked to repeat numbers chorally, scolded for not speaking out, spending hours repeating and copying syllables, asked to paint eggs to demonstrate dozens, they were positioned as children by the 'teacher' ALF. Yet women attended, complied, apologised for not remembering. They compared themselves to children, sometimes seriously, sometimes jokingly, accepting and even naming their classes as *1<sup>o</sup> primaria* (first year of primary school). As Robinson (2003:7) points out:

literacy can be a tool of empowerment or disempowerment. It is how literacy is used that matters, how it is acquired that will determine its value to the learner.

Empowerment is a contested concept. It can be seen as a process of women taking control over their lives, but more than an individual process:

it involves the radical alteration of the processes and structures which reproduce women's subordinate position as a gender (Young, 1997:372).

As 'empowerment' became a "buzzword" of development discourses, it changed from this original meaning, becoming a "fuzzword" (Cornwall & Eade, 2010:1) that is understood and operationalised in varied ways. Ignoring the need for structural change, empowerment is now commonly understood as "the act of a powerful outsider who will come and deliver power to the inside." (Villareal, 1992:265-6).

The pilot programme did not set an aim of empowerment, unable as it was to challenge the structures within which we operated and rejecting the idea that empowerment can be brought by outsiders. Nor was there a specific intention to raise political awareness. However, through encouraging dialogue and expressive writing, the project hoped to encourage literacy learners to express their knowledge and ideas, to counter symbolic violence and resist the rigid hierarchies of CONALFA's structures.

We wanted to counter the perception of 'illiteracy' as described by Torres (2000:151):

It is the illiterate person who is shamed and blamed for being illiterate and not the society which allows and reproduces this form of social injustice\*

During my visits to the pilot project literacy groups I interacted with the participants, working with some individually, listening and contributing to discussions, participating in group activities and sometimes leading activities myself. ALFs were asked to write a case study of one participant in their group, giving background information and reflecting on the participant's learning. At the end of the programme I also had the opportunity to interview a few of the women.

The data I use in this chapter consist of fieldnotes, some recorded discussions in the literacy groups, interviews with ALFs and literacy group participants, and ALFs' assignments about one of the participants. Drawing on the insights of ethnographic work in the tradition of New Literacy Studies, I describe the participants in the context of the communities in which they make their lives, the histories and capitals that they bring to the literacy learning situation, the positions they work to maintain and their engagement with the pilot process.

This chapter addresses the research question: How are literacy group participants positioned in the adult literacy field? This is broken down into three sub-questions:

- what is the situation of participants in the adult literacy groups?
- How do the participants interact with each other and the ALF in the literacy groups?
- What do participants gain from the pilot programme?

Through the chapter I also question whether and in what way the women are empowered.

## **Gloria's Group**

### **Rosa Maria**

Rosa Maria married at the age of seventeen and has four children. Her husband tried three times to cross to the USA.<sup>20</sup> The first two times he was detained and sent back; the third time he disappeared. When she told me about this, she hadn't heard from him for ten months and didn't know where he was or what had happened to him. She was living with her mother now. Rosa Maria was involved in a project that was introducing organic farming in the area. She had been invited to a training course

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<sup>20</sup> About 1 million Guatemalans are working in the USA, many as undocumented migrants. Most people I met knew someone who had made the dangerous journey across Mexico and the border guided by *coyotes* (people smugglers).

which was held in another *departamento* and originally a group from the village was planning to travel there together but the others dropped out and, on the day, Rosa Maria made the journey to town alone with two children to meet participants from other communities and continue the journey to the training venue with them.

Gloria interviewed Rosa Maria for her assignment. She reported that Rosa Maria had not been to school as her parents considered that it was not necessary for girls to study. She described her learning strategies:

Rosa Maria is very studious in spite of the fact that she has many responsibilities in looking after her children. She makes the effort to go over her work at home. [...] She has learned to write and recognise her name and the names of most of her compañeras. She knows the five vowels.

Rosa Maria learns best when she writes everything we do into her notebook and then reads it several times. The activity she likes best is when we use word cards and when we read, although she prefers to read alone. (See Appendix:10 for examples of ALFs' written assignments)

In the unit on the community, Gloria's group engaged in a discussion about how things had changed. The women animatedly shared memories of Hurricane Stan, of the days before there was a bus and you had to walk everywhere, barefoot in the cold. Women would go to fetch wood even when pregnant. They ground the corn with stones and went to do their washing in the early hours of the morning as there was no water later. When they went on to writing, Gloria asked the women what they wanted to say and wrote their sentences down for them to copy. She asked me to help some of the women and working with Rosa Maria, I encouraged her to try to write her own sentence. She wanted to write *Aquí no hay agua* (there is no water here). Starting with *aquí*, using her phonic knowledge, she wrote *aci*, which was a close approximation. She wasn't sure how to write no, so I suggested she look at her alphabet and find a word that starts with the same sound, encouraging her to develop strategies for working things out for herself.

One of the women had copied her sentence *Acá se dan las flores* (flowers grow here) but had omitted the spaces between the words. We divided the words and I asked her to write the sentence again using the Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check (LSCWCh) technique, commonly used in adult literacy work in the UK, which she managed well. Another had a longer sentence: *Mi Comunidad es un lugar lejano pero muy bonito*. (My community is a remote but very beautiful place.) but she had started to write it in large letters across the top of the page and as it did not fit, she abandoned the ending.

She would later copy the words as *planas*. Some of the women managed to read back what they had written and with further support were able to read one another's work.

Facilitators' scribing of participants' spoken comments to create reading texts is known as the "language experience" technique (McCaffery et al., 2007:154). The learner reads back the text, using the knowledge of their own oral expression. The text can then be cut up and manipulated to explore the words and meanings. The short training offered to the ALFs was not adequate for exploring all the possibilities of the technique and ALFs interpreted it in their own ways. Gloria used it to generate sentences which were then copied into the notebook. This fitted with her existing practice and she proposed that this method was how Rosa Maria learned best.

In her assignment, Gloria transcribed Rosa Maria's final comments about the literacy project:

*God willing, I will learn more because I have children and because school is very important. I'm going to come to classes more and go over the work at home. Because this is for my benefit and if I don't take advantage of it, I will regret it. In the future if you [Gloria] leave, nobody is going to teach us to read and write the letters. And I'm grateful to you because you are patient with us. God will repay you.<sup>21</sup>*

Rosa Maria shows gratitude to the facilitator rather than expressing her right to education. She blames herself for her lack of progress rather than demanding a more relevant learning experience. She subscribes to the *illusio* that attending literacy classes will be of benefit to her and co-operates with the teaching regime in the hope that she will make progress.

## **Yezme's Group**

### **Liliana**

Liliana was able to read and write far more than was normal for Yezme's beginners' group but as she had not attended school, she would not be accepted into a 'post-literacy' class. On receiving her copy of *Mi Palabra Escrita*<sup>22</sup> she had read the whole

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<sup>21</sup> Extracts from interviews with participants or texts written by them are presented in this format.

<sup>22</sup> My Words Written – booklet of participant writing from previous year

book at home and found the autobiographical writing the most interesting. She talked about her own life and then agreed to write her story. Her parents had separated when she was young and she was concerned how to express this, worrying that it might be seen as a 'bad example.' She became agitated as she told us that she had been angry with her mother for giving up and leaving. Her mother should have fought for her rights, should have kept the house. The father went on to have more children with another woman. Her half siblings went to school, had easier lives and had inherited her father's land.

Yezme asked her questions, eliciting more details of her experiences. She had travelled all over Guatemala with her mother, in search of work. They had worked in cotton and cane fields, and when they had earned a little money would go back to their village for the *fiestas*. Later she moved to Guatemala City and was employed as a domestic worker. Her employer had been good to her and taught her to read a little, using the traditional method of *planas* of letters and then syllables. Liliana had copied her *planas* in the evening after finishing her work. Occasionally the employer would test her to see if she was learning.

Liliana was often the only person who came to the group and Yezme was able to respond to her specific wishes. She supported her in the writing of her autobiographical text, building on Liliana's existing literacy practices, enabling her to work at text level, helping her to structure her writing, introducing punctuation for meaning-making. Liliana's text was included in that year's booklet of participants' writing (Appendix:11).

I interviewed Liliana at the end of the programme, with Yezme and Mariana present. I was curious to know how she had moved from copying the *planas* that her employer set her, to reading fluently and writing expressively. She explained that when she converted to evangelical Christianity, she bought a bible and was determined to read it. Starting with the letters she knew, she slowly sounded out the words. She told us that she did this alone. When I asked her what advice she would give others who wanted to learn to read she said:

I would say that it depends on each person. If they have that interest for learning [...] Because I said, I want to learn to read because I want to read the bible. That's what I said. So I would say that if you put in the time to learn or ask others to teach you, you can learn.

Liliana had a position in her church keeping records of tickets sold for a weekly event. Since attending the literacy group, she was more confident in taking this responsibility:

Before I always used to ask for help but I can do this better alone now. Sometimes I used to ask how to do it, what letter I had to write but now I'm learning.

Mariana asked her what she had enjoyed most in the group. She said she had learned a lot from the project on the environment and the work on women's rights had been important for her:

Because before my self-esteem was very low. And sometimes people humiliate you, because if they know something, they humiliate others. But really when *La Seño*<sup>23</sup> started to talk about this and it's true that professional work is valid but even if you are a professional or not, we have the same value. That's what I think. Before God, we all have the same value.

Drawing on her political convictions, Yezme had been doing conscientisation work with her group on environmental matters and women's rights. She wanted to share her own awareness of these issues with the group. Liliana evaluated Yezme's approach:

Because let's say it was in her way of being. She... how can I say it, she is patient with us, she gives us her friendship as well. So that's where I gained confidence with others.

## **Andrea's Group**

### **Erlinda**

Andrea's group were having a discussion about the family. Doña Mari had lived with her parents-in-law for ten years while Erlinda explained that she and her husband had always lived separately from his parents. Times are changing she told us and suggested that hers was a modern family. Doña Elsa's son and wife lived with her, but she tried not to interfere in their lives. This was also a modern family, Erlinda told Doña Elsa. They spoke about how it had been in the past when the new daughter-in-law was given all the worst tasks in the household. She had to get up early and light the fire and make the tortillas for breakfast. Doña Mari argued that people should treat their son's wife well, as they would their own daughter.

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<sup>23</sup> Respectful form of address for a teacher.

Erlinda also wanted to know about Doña Valeria's family. Erlinda is a K'iche speaker and also speaks fluent Spanish. Doña Valeria spoke very little Spanish but was able to tell the group that she had moved to the town only 4 months ago. Her family came from a rural area where Mam is spoken and as she never went to school, she didn't learn to speak Spanish. She had twelve children, four sons and eight daughters. One of her daughters was also in the group and she shyly told us that when she married, she would like to stay with her mother. The other women agreed that this was also a possibility. When they came to write about their families, Erlinda wrote:

I am from Tierra Blanca but I have been living here for a long time. I have four children and consider my family to be modern. Two of my children are at school.

At the end of the session, Andrea asked if anyone had any questions for me and Erlinda wanted to know about family customs in my country. She also asked me about money, whether we were paid in dollars. Another day I brought in some dollars and pounds and we worked out the value of the various amounts. Erlinda was swift at these calculations and was able to explain how she did them.

When I interviewed her, she told me that she had only completed the first year of primary school because her mother could not afford to send her children to school. When Andrea came to invite her to join the group, she took the opportunity. Erlinda said she could already read and write a little, but she particularly wanted to improve her mathematics. She also told Andrea that she wanted to improve her Spanish as she was concerned that she mispronounced many words. She was active in her community and a member of the health commission, which was set up by the *alcalde*<sup>24</sup> and supported by the health centre. She explained how this worked:

There are not many government employees now and they don't support health. So there are ten of us in the health commission to see what people need. And we support each other in the group. When there is an emergency, for example if a woman is pregnant and the time of her labour comes, what we do is to collect some money between us, our grain of sand you might say. We call a taxi and pay for it and we take her [to hospital] and that's the support we give to the community.

I feel good about this because we have learned many things that we didn't know before. They teach us and we learn and apart from that,

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<sup>24</sup> Elected community leader

something in the family... for example if a child is eating and starts to choke... so they have taught us first aid. So we have to know this and other things and I feel good because of what I have learned with them.

The group chose local history and health for their Community projects. Andrea asked Erlinda to give a talk about health issues and to demonstrate first aid techniques. At first Erlinda was reluctant, but with a little persuasion, acknowledged that in her role as a health commission member, it was important to develop the ability to speak in public and share what she had learned; talking to the literacy group was a good place to start. Andrea's sister, who is a member of the *CoCoDe* (Community Development Committee), also came to give a talk. Women formed a majority of the *CoCoDe* and Erlinda had also wanted to join the committee, but she was not able to attend the meeting where the election was held as her mother was very ill.

Erlinda valued the group not only for the literacy work but also for the friendships that formed in the process of sharing ideas. Through what she learned, she felt more able to help her children:

To support them to study so that they don't remain like us who didn't have the opportunity to study. But now they can have that opportunity, so we are going to support our children as well as other people who don't know how to read and write.

Like so many women who have been denied access to formal education, Erlinda hoped that her children would gain an education that would give them more opportunities. Her commitment to working for her community chimed with Andrea's own community engagement. Andrea told me she had felt supported by Erlinda:

Doña Erlinda helped me with the talks about health. She supported me. It was a great help that she came to explain to them [the participants] as a friend and not like somebody from outside, who comes to do a presentation.

Andrea had broken down the traditional hierarchy of literacy groups. She had become teacher-student with the group as students-teachers. She was another *compañera* sharing her knowledge with them as they also exchanged experiences and ideas among themselves.



## Mariana's Group

### Veronica and Magdalena

Mariana had arranged with Doña Veronica that we would come to her house to interview her. The house was quite comfortable with a large room and sofas. More fortunate than Rosa Maria's husband, Doña Veronica's husband had worked in the USA and with the money he earned they had been able to buy a piece of land and build a house. Doña Veronica also ran a small mill, where neighbours would come with their corn which would be ground with water into *masa* for making *tortillas*.

She became tearful as she talked about her childhood:

We were eleven siblings and I was the oldest of the sisters. I had two older brothers. They didn't send me to school because... my father worked making bricks, but he drank a lot. He left at 6:00 in the morning and came home at 5:00 in the evening. And he gave very little to my mother. My mother went out selling, she tried to find ways to earn something to feed us and I stayed at home cooking for my sisters and brothers. My older brother also worked. I had to go and take lunch to them. I was ten years old.

At the age of eleven I went to do domestic work. It was about half an hour away or more and on foot because in those days there was no road, only a path. And my mother came to collect what I earned because she needed it for my other brothers and sisters. I cleaned and looked after children, that was the work that I did.

She also told us that one day one of the children fell over in the kitchen and the cook, blaming Veronica, hit her. She told her mother that she didn't want to work there anymore, but her mother insisted she continue because they needed the money.

Veronica was proudly Maya and spoke K'iche with her parents, grandparents, aunts and older neighbours. She told us:

We mustn't lose our language because our ancestors have left us these languages, [...] We have to raise up our language so that it doesn't get lost. Some changes are not good because we are losing the language that we speak. If we taught the language to our children, then yes, but now there are many who have abandoned our language. It's important to speak both. Our language is important.

During one session, Mariana's group went out to read and take photos of street signs. Veronica fluently read the name of the school where the group met, demonstrating her

ability to read familiar text but later she was reluctant to read other signs. Mariana explained that she did not want neighbours to realise she was learning to read. On the way back, Veronica told me that she had three sons in the USA and one was married to a *gringa*, so he had gained legal status. The couple had come to visit, and she was hoping to visit them in the USA. She was very excited about this and told me it was important to learn to read before she went there so that her son would not be ashamed of his illiterate mother.

Veronica had come early that day, so Mariana started to do some alphabet work with her as we waited for the others. Mariana wrote the alphabet on the board and I asked Veronica which letters she recognised. Very few, she said and named about five. I asked her to think about the letters in her name and she was able to recognise many more. Then she approached the board and started to go through the alphabet in order. She did it a couple of times, making some mistakes the first time, which Mariana corrected, getting more right each time, and then repeating it over to herself without anyone asking her to. She was bringing her own strategies to the learning process.

Magdalena was one of the beginners in Mariana's group who was so lost the day when Mariana introduced the whole alphabet (see previous chapter). Magdalena told me her parents had sent her to school but on the first day the teacher hit her on the fingertips with a ruler, so she never went back. Now she is a housewife and helps her mother to make *tortillas* for sale. On my first visit to the group, she told me she still couldn't write her name and when I looked in her notebook, I saw that her name was written once on the first page and then there were pages of *planas* of decontextualized letters and syllables.

On my next visit, nearly a month later, she told me that she had learned the vowels but no consonants. That day the group were working with word cards, trying to recognise words that they had written the previous session. Most of these words were related to their domestic responsibilities. They first selected their own words and then worked on reading all the words, starting with the most advanced participants. Magdalena watched and listened carefully and when it was her turn, she read the words confidently. Mariana then cut the cards into syllables and the women had fun putting the words back together. Magdalena, in particular, seemed to enjoy the activity.

Then Mariana suggested they make sentences using the words. One of the words was *atender* (attend to the someone's needs) and one woman said that she liked to attend to her husband and the others laughed. Then another woman produced a sentence that included all the words: At home you have to do the cleaning, then the washing, water the flowers, look after (*atender*) the children and the rest of the day is for sewing. Another participant responded that she did the housework in a different order. There was a potential here for a discussion about housework, problematising women's work but it had not been planned for and was missed. The more advanced writers in the group wrote their sentences and the beginners chose one of the words. Veronica talked about attending to her customers at the mill and wanted to write *atender*. Magdalena also chose this word. Mariana wrote the word for them and they copied it into their notebooks. I worked with Magdalena, encouraging her to cover the word and try to write it again from memory, which she was able to do. As her mother had a shop where they sold the tortillas, I wondered if she would also like to write that word (*tienda*) as it had some of the same sounds as *atender*, but Magdalena said she couldn't hear the similarity in the words and was not interested in trying to. Processing sounds was difficult for her.

Magdalena's school-age daughter often came to the group with her and on this day, she took over tutoring her mother, giving her *planas* to copy. Mariana started another activity with cards and again Magdalena was able to recognise a number of words. Visual recognition was easier than processing sounds. I observed Magdalena on other occasions managing well in activities that required visual memory and recognition of words in context or manipulating word or syllable cards. But she found it difficult to recognise or memorise individual letters. I wondered if she would realise that she could use contextual clues and visual recognition as a strategy for developing her reading. But this was difficult because of the influence of the literacy learning *doxa*. Her daughter's solicitous encouragement of her *planas* of decontextualized letters and syllables was based on her own experience of learning at school. Magdalena also told us she wanted to learn the alphabet as her brother had said that once she knew the alphabet, she would be able to read. Magdalena could not question this time-honoured way of learning. This was how it was done, anything else was unthinkable. Although she had shown that she could visually recognise contextualised words, that experience was not valued as a learning strategy.

While working on the 'Album' activity, the group looked at similar texts in *Mi Palabra Escrita*. I asked them if they felt they were similar to any of the women they read about, and Veronica said that none were like her because she had a business, referring to her mill. We looked back at the texts and the group agreed that some of the women did have businesses. One kept cows, and others grew vegetables.

Mariana usually started the class with a prayer and on one occasion she asked Veronica to lead it. Veronica addressed her God as *Papaito Lindo* (Beautiful little father) and thanked him for the air we breathed. Veronica was born in this area when it was a K'iche village and had witnessed many changes over the years. The other participants had migrated to the area at different times, but all had observed changes. They talked about water and electricity and the family who used to own all the land but now had sold most of it. Agriculture was receding, and fruit trees had disappeared. Veronica told us that the foul-smelling stream that I crossed on every visit had once been clean and people used to wash clothes there, but it had been polluted by a tannery. The women later took their washing to the *pila*<sup>25</sup> but they had to wait in line as there were only six *lavaderos*<sup>26</sup>. The nearest *molino* (mill) was an hour's walk away. The participants exchanged experiences and memories and the group decided to do a project about this for the final unit.

Mariana sometimes went to Veronica's house when she did not come to the group and worked with her one to one. Veronica told us that her grand-daughter, who has started secondary school also helped her to learn, setting *planas* for her. Veronica said that when she started, she only knew the vowels and she couldn't join the letters. Now she was able to read street signs and everything she had written in her notebook. Her husband had congratulated her on being able to read. Veronica recognised that she needed to keep reading to maintain and develop what she had learned. She had particularly enjoyed working in a group, getting to know the other women and learning together.

Magdalena made slow progress in recognising and processing the sounds of letters, which is the goal that she had set herself. The pilot was not able to break through the *doxa* of literacy learning enough to enable her to value the reading practices she was

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<sup>25</sup> Communal washing area with running water

<sup>26</sup> Structure built from concrete for washing clothes, also sometimes called *pila*

starting to access. Towards the end of the course, Mariana spent extra time coaching Magdalena to enable her to pass the assessment test. That's what counts, Mariana concluded, confirming her position of understanding learning as the display of knowledge for evaluation (See previous chapter).

## **Dayana and Gabriela's Group**

### **Doña Laura**

Doña Laura was the oldest participant in this group. At the end of the second unit, Gabriela wrote about her progress:

She is a very active participant who in spite of her 65 years is motivated to learn to read and write. She is very participative and collaborative. She came without knowing even one letter but today she has advanced and that gives me a lot of satisfaction. She recognises her name and the names of her children and she always goes over what we have done during these months.

Gabriela reported that she had used word cards with names and significant words in working with Doña Laura. She noted that when reading, Doña Laura focused on decoding the first syllable in a word to predict the possible meaning and repeated words once decoded to reinforce the meaning. Gabriela had also shown her how to use 'LSCWCh' to learn the spelling of new words.

Laura is Maya-K'iche and speaks Spanish with a marked accent. She wears *corte* and like other women of her age, has her hair in long plaits braided with a wide ribbon. Laura grew up in a small rural community and her family moved down the mountain after her grandparents died. In an interview Laura told me why she hadn't been to school:

Because before, our parents told us that women didn't need to study. Only the men had the right to study, but not the women. They told us, you girls, what for? One day you will get married and go with your husbands, schooling won't be of any use to you. Well because we didn't know anything and in the old days there was more respect, so we respected... We kept quiet. We didn't say anything. And that's how it was.

There was no school where she grew up. Her brothers walked to the neighbouring village as did some of the girls from her community. When the family moved, her younger sisters also went to school, but not all of them finished primary education. She felt deprived by her lack of schooling:

I felt bad because I wanted to study. I wanted to read, I wanted to write. Let's say, you go to church. You see that the others are looking at their bibles, they go to bible study and me, I just stay there, just a listener... Because you need it. But it's late for me. Yes, it's very late for me.

Laura was quiet and unassuming, embodying the respect that she referred to. During one of my visits, the group was doing an activity with numbers where they formed two- or three-digit numbers with cards and said what the number was. Laura participated putting the numbers together but was not given the chance to speak as someone always said her number before she could do so herself. Dayana noted that the mini whiteboards were really helpful in getting Laura to build confidence, to practise before she dared to write in her notebook.

Doña Laura told me that she had attended a CONALFA class before but had not learned anything. This time she had learned to write her own name, some other names and the vowels. She had enjoyed drawing pictures and going out to read street signs and visit the Lion's Cave (see below). She needed to learn more. Her brothers told her that they had gone to school for many years to learn, she could not expect to learn everything in one year. She found it hard to remember and wondered if she was a worse learner than the children.

### **Glendy**

Glendy was one of the youngest in the group. Dayana and Gabriela told me that she was the oldest of many siblings and was abused by her parents in terms of the amount of work she was expected to do. Glendy had been to school sporadically but never managed to complete the first year. Her attendance at the literacy group was also uneven and she often came late. Glendy wanted attention and thrived when she received it. In her enthusiasm to learn she had copied whole paragraphs from a newspaper into a notebook when Gabriela had suggested that she should circle words that she could recognise.

While using the dice that Dayana and Gabriela had made, Glendy struggled with subtraction. Gabriela and Dayana gave a variety of concrete examples to help her but it was only when they worked with money that she was instantly able to do the calculations. The context was the key.

The day we went out to read and take photos of street signs, I offered my phone to the group, but only Glendy took up the offer and excitedly conferred with me about what to take pictures of while I encouraged her to read what she was photographing. A public telephone was one of the objects she chose and then she asked me to take a photo of her pretending to make a call. The smile on her face in that picture was striking. She had clearly enjoyed the afternoon, a break from her burdensome responsibilities at home.

### **Doña Aurora**

The group were discussing which topic they would work on for the community project. They talked about agriculture, the vegetables that they grew and sold in the markets. They commented how lack of rain had affected the corn crops. They discussed climate change, pollution and the ozone layer and how this impacted on their work. Doña Aurora joked that since they worked hard in the fields, they were always hungry.

The women exchanged memories of how the community had changed and remembered that there was a lion's cave nearby that the village was named after. Doña Aurora suggested that we arrange a visit to the cave. There was a local historian who knew the way. But what Doña Aurora had shared about the history of the community far outshone what the local historian told us when he came, explaining as he did, only the origin of the village's name, before guiding us to the 'lion's cave.'

Doña Aurora had strong views about her identity. She said that the women should not be called indigenous or Maya but by their local area. The *corte* that they wore identified them. Each district had its own *corte* and you could tell where people were from by what they were wearing. Doña Aurora was a K'iche speaker who also expressed herself fluently in Maya influenced Spanish. I interviewed her at the end of the programme. She was born in the mountains and her family did not have land. She explained that there was no work for men in those days and the family made a living by cutting wood and selling it in town. One load of firewood would earn enough to buy the corn they needed for one day's food. Her parents sent her to school with a notebook but the teacher would not accept her as she needed more notebooks for the different subjects. As her parents couldn't afford to buy more notebooks, she was unable to study. Later her father got a job as a woodcutter with the municipality and so their situation improved a little.

Aurora's great grandmother had been a midwife:

She was the midwife of this community. [...] She went to see women give birth and she told me all the stories. She told me, keep them in your mind, you will find this useful one day and though you don't know how to read, it will be useful. She also didn't know how to read but she knew many things and explained them to me.

Aurora told me that one of the statues in town showing a Maya woman was inspired by her great grandmother. This history gave her a respected position and Dayana commented that Aurora would help to maintain order if the group got out of control, scolding the young women when they weren't co-operating.

She's not afraid of anyone. She would say "pay attention to *La Seño*, sit down, or answer or do your work." So she helped us.

Aurora had joined a literacy group when her children were younger, but it had been difficult to manage all her work and she had given up. Now her oldest was 24, she decided to try again. When she told her children, they said it would be shameful for her to go back to study at her age, but she insisted. She wanted to learn the letters, she told me:

It was the letters, the first ones. But also what the words mean, the syllabic groups. That's what we didn't know and also the vowels, how they are pronounced and how we can write them. That's what motivated us.

She had also learned to write her name and the names of her children and her husband.

I know his surname and what he is called but I couldn't write it in my notebook but now we can do this.

Letters came first in her list of what she had learned. But she was able to identify literacy practices beyond this. She felt that she had learned a lot and the group had got to know each other well. She wanted more support from CONALFA. She explained that there are still many people who cannot afford to send their children to school and so the literacy classes are an opportunity for the young people to learn:

They [CONALFA] should give us a little more opportunity to meet so that we can form a big group and they can give jobs to the teachers so that they can teach the people who don't know. Because there are a lot of people who don't know.



## Alejandra's Group

### Irma

Doña Irma was the *Madre Guía* who hosted the group. A lively, talkative woman, she found it difficult to sit and concentrate on the written word. As a community leader, it was humiliating to be placed in the position of a learner. She told Alejandra that she couldn't focus when there were people around her and preferred to work alone. As Doña Irma was usually there when Alejandra arrived, while others came later, it was possible for Alejandra to work with her one-to-one.

On one of my visits, as we were waiting for the others to come, Doña Irma told us something about her life. Her parents rejected her when she became pregnant at the age of 14. She left home and found work in restaurants and then became pregnant again. She returned home with her two daughters and her mother took her in but told her she had to go out to work to support her children. The family had cows and Irma sold milk door to door and also ran a market stall where she met her current partner. Eventually they were able to save enough money to buy a plot of land and build a house and this is where the classes were held. Doña Irma was now working as a cook and her employer was encouraging her to learn to read and write so that she would be able to get a better job.

In the unit on the family, Doña Irma became enthusiastically engaged when learning to write the names of her children. Alejandra noted:

You realise who is the favourite [...] I noticed with Doña Irma that the first name that she learned was her granddaughter's and her daughter's and the others were a bit more difficult, because of her interest. So you realise something in that because you have to keep observing.

### Clara and Cecilia

Clara and Cecilia were the more confident members of the group who had led the presentation of the significant words poster that I described in the previous chapter. Clara had drawn a house and written *mi hogar* (my home) while Cecilia had drawn an elaborate flower which identified her as an embroiderer. Cecilia took her copy of *Mi Palabra Escrita* home to read and then told us that her husband had read the whole booklet and enjoyed it. Her husband had encouraged her to join the literacy group and although she had initially been reluctant, he had persisted until she agreed to go.

In contrast, Clara's husband and her in-laws, who they lived with, were critical of her participation in the group and made regular attendance difficult.

When asked to select something from the booklet to read, Cecilia chose one of the shorter, easier pieces. I suggested she try something more challenging and she was able to read the longest and most difficult texts. Listening to her read aloud there were points where the meaning was lost through the intonation of her voice and I pointed out to her how to use the punctuation to express sentence boundaries. She quickly grasped how to do this. Something similar happened with writing a text. She wanted to write about embroidery but her first attempt lacked structure and neither Alejandra nor I could understand what she was trying to communicate. Alejandra worked with her on this, drawing out what she wanted to express and helping her to formulate it in a more coherent way. Later when the group were writing an evaluation of the first unit, she constructed a much clearer text with far less support. Structuring an extended text was not a practice she had any experience in but was quickly able to pick this up with some support from the ALF.

### **Doña Nidia**

Alejandra wrote her case study about an older woman, Doña Nidia:

Doña Nidia is 65 years old, she has three living children and three of her children have died. She always looks after her two grandchildren. She has had a difficult life but in spite of this, her enthusiasm in wanting to learn more every day is an inspiration for all those around her.

When she was a child she didn't want to continue studying because the school was very far from where she lived and when she was coming back from school the children chased her and hit her until one day, they made her nose bleed and she didn't want to go back.

She was given a diagnostic test when she started but she couldn't even write her name because her knowledge of writing was nil.

During my first visit to the group, when they were working on their poster, Doña Nidia drew flowers and wrote *jardín* (garden). When the poster was completed, the women copied some of the words into their notebooks. Doña Nidia selected the three shortest words: *casa*, *flor*, *amor*, (house, flower, love) but she made a mistake in each of them: *acsa*, *omor* and the 'f' in *flor* was backwards.

By the following visit she had made substantial progress. The group was now working on the 'Album' activity, writing short texts alongside photos of themselves. As Doña Nidia had missed a session, Alejandra asked me to support her in doing her writing.

We started by reading similar texts from *Mi Palabra Escrita*. This was hard work, but she did it with determination, asking for help when she needed it, repeating the words she struggled with to get the sense. She read three and then stopped. After a pause she read another three and that was sufficient.

When she started to write her own text, she needed support. I tried to lead her to draw on her own intellectual resources rather than giving her the answers but she needed me to be there. When my attention wandered, observing what was going on in the group, she called me back with another question. I was impressed by her persistence, her desire to learn and the effective strategies she was using to do so. Alejandra told me that Doña Nidia wanted to learn to read the bible and that this was what motivated her. Alejandra noted:

Doña Nidia likes to learn and she wants somebody beside her. She is active, she asks questions all the time.

On my next visit, Doña Nidia came late as she had been working in the fields harvesting peas. She was tired and found it difficult to concentrate; the enthusiasm with which I had seen her work before was missing. Clearly the impact of hard physical labour at her age impacted on her ability to learn. On another day she arrived very upset. She had been given an injection which had caused an allergic reaction, a rash on the neck. Alejandra suggested that she go to hospital and Doña Nidia became tearful telling us that three of her children had died in hospital and she didn't want to go there. Alejandra comforted and reassured her and reminded her that she was a strong woman. Doña Nidia usually came late and often left early. She seemed preoccupied and did not always engage with the other participants in the group. This impact of the precarity of poverty on mental health was often raised by ALFs in discussions.

While working on the third unit about the community, the group produced a map of the neighbourhood. They discussed the problems in the municipality: corruption, pollution, inadequate transport and poor services and wrote about one of the places they had included in the map. Doña Nidia chose to write about the health centre, saying that it's good when you don't have any money. The group discussed the health centre, where student doctors are placed for practice. They commented how rude people working there sometimes were. They agreed that a private doctor could not be rude as you are paying. Doña Nidia wrote: *El centro de salud sirve cuando uno se*

*pone mal y no tiene dinero.* (The health centre is useful when you get ill and don't have money).

### **Group Project**

Doña Irma suggested that for their community project the group should investigate why people didn't attend literacy classes. Doña Nidia argued that it was because of poverty, that people preferred to work and earn money. The group shared their experiences of school. Clara had found learning difficult, she had to repeat the first year three times and when she failed to pass on the third occasion, her father told her she was stupid and sent her to work. She recalled that she often went to school hungry which would explain her difficulties. Cecilia had missed out on school as a child because of poor health and later did not want to go back as she was older than the other children. Doña Nidia told us the teachers were violent, they pulled you by the ears and banged your head against the blackboard.

The group took up Irma's suggestion and decided to carry out interviews with their families and neighbours. Based on the interviews they found five main reasons why people were not interested in joining a literacy group:

- People are ashamed that others should find out that they don't know how to read
- They find it difficult to learn
- They think that studying is a waste of time
- That at their age it is not useful
- For married women, their husbands don't allow it.

They wrote three case studies of women who did not want to join the group and then contrasted their own position:

*We have decided to study to learn to read better and write clearly, to be able to sign papers and write what really interests us. We are motivated to move forward and better ourselves, to find better work with better opportunities and to think differently than before.*

In the final unit, the group decided to create a recipe book. Doña Irma showed the others how to cook dishes they were not familiar with and together they put together lists of ingredients and agreed how to write the instructions. Cecilia and Clara acted as scribes for the recipes.

Alejandra commented on the process:

They decided and chose their topic and they expressed themselves and organised themselves really well (...) and that they wrote and edited it themselves was a great satisfaction for me.

Before the programme finished, Clara got a job in a takeaway restaurant. She had to read and pack the orders. She told us that the confidence she had developed through attending the literacy course, had enabled her to apply for the job.

## **Reflections**

All these stories indicate the impact of poverty on literacy learning in Guatemala as Doña Nidia had argued. Over 20% of Guatemalans live in extreme poverty, many of these being rural families without land, a situation aggravated by the spread of coffee, sugarcane, palm and rubber plantations as well as cattle ranches. In 2014 nearly half the population stated that there were days when they were concerned they would not have anything to eat. Clara mentioned that she often went to school hungry. A survey on wellbeing showed that health, jobs and income, and housing are valued more highly than education and for indigenous communities, nutrition takes a higher priority than education (PNUD, 2016).

Participants in the pilot project literacy groups were all women and almost all indigenous Mayas. This brings additional dimensions of racial and gender discrimination to the issue of poverty. Laura and Rosa Maria were not sent to school because their parents did not consider education necessary for girls. Gender inequality in education is more marked among the rural poor. Oldest daughters in particular such as Veronica, Laura or Glendy were expected to carry out extensive domestic work and had less opportunity to study. As adults too, women may have difficulty attending literacy programmes. Clara's attendance was impeded by her husband.

Verdugo & Raymundo (2009) point out that the curriculum offered to indigenous children is inappropriate and the school drop out rate in indigenous areas is higher. While bilingual adult literacy is now offered in 17 Mayan languages, the approach is the teaching of the common and different letter sounds in the indigenous language and Spanish. The aim is not to maintain the indigenous languages or to offer a culturally appropriate programme but to use the classes as a bridge towards the learning of Spanish.

Average years of schooling completed by adults was estimated as 5.6 in 2014 but for indigenous communities this was reduced to 4 years and amongst the poorest quintile it was 3.1, although these figures are higher for 15-23-year olds. Primary school enrolment reached 98.7% in 2009 but dropped to 82.3% in 2014, demonstrating the state's inability to provide education for all children. Repetition rates, while decreasing in recent years, are still nearly 10% and only 26% of children nationally attain expected reading levels with the figure dropping below 20% in rural areas and even lower for indigenous children. While the appropriateness and validity of such assessments can be questioned, the results are also reflected in the low levels of secondary school enrolment: less than half of children enrol in lower secondary school (PNUD, 2016). This situation indicates that poor literacy experiences are a continuing problem in Guatemala and Glendy's experience is a telling example.

Shame related to limited literacy experience is noted by various writers (Gardener, 1991; Torres, 2000; Bartlett, 2007; Schmelkes, 2008). Many of the participants expressed shame about their inability to read and did not recognise their existing literacy practices. Doña Veronica was able to read the sign outside the school and no doubt other contextualised texts, but she described herself as knowing the letters but not being able to join them. Erlinda computed complex calculations and then stated she needed to study mathematics. Nabi et al (2009) Seda Santana & Torres Vazquez (2010) Kalman & Street (2013) and Rogers (2017) show that such undervaluing of everyday literacy practices is common where literacy is understood as what is learned in schools, the *doxa* that Magdalena adheres to and that we have tried to disrupt with the pilot literacy programme.

Violence also emerged as an issue. Doña Nidia recalled assaults by teachers and Magdalena dropped out of school on the first day, after being hit. Symbolic violence is also perpetrated through the rigidity of teaching methods, the outdated and irrelevant curriculum and the imposed forms of the Spanish language, so distant from the ways many people speak. The school drop-out rate reflects violence as well as poverty.

How far was the experience of the literacy programme empowering for the women? Within the field of adult literacy, the women bring low levels of cultural capital as understood by the institution and structures they engage with, yet within their own communities, their position can be quite different. Veronica's economic capital of a desirable home and a small business gives her a strong position within her community

which she refers to when she suggests she is different from other women attending literacy classes. Within the literacy group she is respected for her knowledge of the area. Yet she felt shame for her 'illiteracy' and undervalued her existing literacy practices. She told us that she had learned to read street signs, but I suspect she was already doing this before the start of the programme. She demonstrated the ability to use a variety of strategies in developing her reading, but as she could not name or sound out all the letters in the words, and because she had not been to school, she identified herself as 'illiterate.' The completion of the programme and the certificate that verified her literate status had symbolic value for her, a form of institutionalised capital that countered her shame and allowed her to face her foreign daughter-in-law with pride.

Irma's social capital of being named a *Madre Guía* and becoming a community leader articulates in a contradictory way with the shame she expresses at her difficulties with reading and the wish to hide this. Erlinda is also active in her community, both in the health commission and development issues and hopes to be elected to the community development committee. With her community development experience, she acts inclusively in the group, encouraging less confident women to participate. The literacy group gives her the opportunity to strengthen her identity as a volunteer health worker by giving a talk about first aid and health issues, which links to other positions that she is developing in the community. Aurora's lineage, what she learned from her great-grandmother and her knowledge of local history, allow her to take a position of authority both in her community and within the literacy group, speaking out on various issues and assisting the ALFs in maintaining order. These women do not seek or gain empowerment through literacy learning, their positions are negotiated in other networks that are only tentatively linked to the literacy programme.

Rosa Maria's economic needs are more likely to be met through the organic farming project than working on literacy using the educational methods encouraged by Gloria and this commitment takes priority over attendance at the group. She may develop specific literacy practices through the process of engaging in the organic farming project as observed in other contexts by Rogers (2017). Liliana and Clara both gained confidence during the programme, which enabled them to undertake jobs where they would also develop specific literacy practices.

Liliana stated that the relationship with Yezme and the discussions on equality had enabled her growth in confidence. Nabi et al. (2009) stress the importance of relationships in literacy learning: the value of scaffolding for learning and help from others. Both Doña Nidia and Glendy needed and responded to such support. Laura, who had given up on her first attempt to learn with CONALFA, made progress this time because of the efforts of Gabriela and Dayana to find ways of working that facilitated her learning. Alejandra and Yezme also developed supportive relationships with their participants. Erlinda valued the relationships developed with other participants in her group. Andrea's egalitarian community-focussed approach encouraged the women in her group to interact with each other, as well as with her.

Rogers (2017) argues that adults learn better through informal relationships rather than structured programmes. Liliana, Erlinda, Cecilia and Clara had all developed effective reading practices outside the formal schooling environment. Nabi et al (2009:106) noted that those who learned outside formal structures demonstrated "seriousness, self-determination, and commitment." Doña Nidia came to the literacy group with such determination and commitment, despite the poverty that affected her mental health and ability to focus.

Kalman (2003) argues that literacy programmes should be situated within the contexts of the lives of the learners. The starting point should be not only how they read and write but what knowledge they bring about their communities and their culture. ALFs need to know how to support participants to develop their reading and writing. Nabi et al (2009) draw similar conclusions, adding that ALFs need training to be able to respond to the needs and wishes of the participants. Verdugo & Raymundo (2009:191) stress the need for flexibility:

Methodological rigidity should be substituted by methods which allow the possibility of adapting to the specific demands of the people attending literacy classes and to continually innovate the ways of teaching.

The pilot project attempted to do this, introducing an approach that challenged the *doxa* of alphabetization, offering instead the opportunity to debate and express ideas, to use existing knowledge for developing written texts, and gaining new knowledge through community research projects. The project attempted to support ALFs to become aware of and respond to different ways of learning. The results depended on the interplay between the expectations of the participants, the experiences and readiness to experiment of the ALFs and my ability to find ways to support the ALFs to



work with a model so different to their previous experience. Gains for participants varied, shaped by these complex interactions. However, the limited resources and time constraints restricted what could be achieved while the *doxa* that we were questioning was very strong.

## 7. Collaborative Learning and Collective Construction of Knowledge

### Introduction

In a review of papers published over ten years in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Beatrice Avalos (2011:18) concludes that "The power of teacher co-learning emerges very strongly from the studies reviewed." She states:

An important part of teacher learning is mediated through dialogues, conversations and interactions centred on materials and situations. Teacher professional development often involves horizontal sharing of ideas and experiences, active participation in projects or becoming aware of problems that need solutions (p.16).

Other writers have also referred to the social aspects of teacher development.

Korthagen (2010:99) argues that "learning emerges from our own actions in relation to those of others" and that "we should view student teacher learning as being part of the process of participation in social practice." He recommends collaborative learning, which he understands as "the co-creation of educational and pedagogical meanings within professional communities of teachers-as-learners" (p.104). Kelly (2006:510) proposes that knowing-in-practice is a process that develops not just within the individual but in dialogue with other participants.

knowing-in-practice is a dynamic process resulting from the collaborative actions of teachers and students together in the context of their own work. It is specific, indeed unique, to particular instances of social practice.

In their rigorous literature review of teacher education in developing countries, Westbrook et al. (2013) note that there has been a shift in recent years towards an understanding of collective learning in teacher development. They stress the importance of peer support but state that more research is needed on how teachers create a community of practice, on how peer support works and how it can be strengthened. All these writers agree that current policies which focus on accountability and attainment are detracting from possibilities of imaginative, collaborative teacher development.

In a recent paper Avalos and Flores (2017) propose that there are four levels of teacher collaboration:

1. Story-telling and scanning: informal exchanges in staffrooms and corridors

2. Aid and assistance: where colleagues support each other through observing and feeding back on practice.
3. Sharing: materials and ideas leading to productive discussion.
4. Joint work: collective responsibility where teachers agree to work in a specific way.

As ALFs working in their communities do not have the possibility of informal conversations in staffrooms and corridors, the pilot project created this opportunity in the context of the fortnightly workshops. At the beginning of each workshop, ALFs would share their experiences of working with the pilot activities, commenting on how participants had engaged with them and what difficulties they had encountered. They were able to support each other through feedback in the process of this exchange. They also reported any additions or changes they had made and brought examples of materials they had created, which led to productive discussions. The pilot in itself was joint work and the ALFs that participated took collective responsibility for working with the approach. Thus, the pilot offered the possibility of collaboration at all four of the levels.

In this chapter I focus on the social aspects of the ALFs' development, exploring the processes of dialogue, peer support and collaboration which led to a deeper understanding of pedagogical practices at both a personal and collective level. I also observe how a team identity developed through the process. The chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part I examine the opportunities for collaboration in the training and development workshops and what emerged in these activities. In the second part I present the processes and results of the first systematisation workshop and in the third part I report on the final systematisation, and the concluding responses of the ALFs to the pilot, focussing in particular on the collective construction of knowledge.

The chapter addresses the following research questions:

- How do ALFs articulate their own learning?
- What forms does the collective construction of knowledge take?
- What emerges from the systematisation process?

## **Training and Development Workshops**

Due to the difficulty in forming literacy groups in 2016, which led to delay in the start of the training, we were only able to offer ten half-day training and development

workshops during the course of the programme. This was very little, given that only two of the ALFs had worked with CONALFA previously while all the others were new. Many writers have pointed out the inadequacy of the training that is offered to ALFs in relation to what is expected of them (Messina, 2005; Rogers, 2005; Galvan, 2008; Rogers & Street, 2012) and the training offered to the ALFs working on the pilot programme was no exception. However, the commitment and enthusiasm of the pilot team meant that more was achieved than could have been expected. The workshops were not all planned in advance but attempted to respond to issues that emerged during visits to groups and discussions in the workshops.

In the early workshops, the modelling of pilot activities was a core strategy. The ALFs learned to write their names in Arabic script using their non-dominant hand, and then working together, identified common letters. However, the value of this activity was understood in different ways. One of the ALFs commented that she enjoyed learning this and that it felt like the first day at school; another suggested that such activities would increase attendance while a third stated that by broadening her knowledge she would be able to give better explanations to her participants. Others did make the connection that the experience of learning to write their names using an unknown script and their non-dominant hand made them more aware of what it felt like to be a literacy learner and observing their own reactions, they were able to reflect on how such an activity could enable learning.

When asked to lead the activity themselves with the ALF team, this became difficult. Rather than asking "helping questions" (Torrance & Pryor, 2001) such as "we can see there are a lot of us with the same letter at the end of our names, what sound is that?" they would ask "testing questions" such as: "Who has the letter A?". Arabic letters were referred to with Spanish names rather than identified as representing sounds.

We also practised the 'Significant Words' activity in the workshop. Gloria led this after reading the instructions in the guide. ALFs, in the role of literacy group participants, were invited to draw a picture that represented something important in their lives and then show it to the group and explain its meaning. They then learned to write their chosen words, in Arabic script, which would be written on the pictures and made into a poster. The images shared were varied and interesting: skills such as sewing, religious symbols, and abstract concepts such as solidarity. They were presented briefly and clearly. The activity worked just as it was intended.

I was visiting Alejandra's group when she led this same activity, as described in Chapter 5. She brought the resulting poster to the next workshop, as did Yezme. Yezme showed her poster first. She had called the activity 'significant experiences' and vividly shared the stories of the pictures. One woman had drawn a brush and comb and explained that it was important to look after yourself and remain attractive for your husband and children. Yezme had chosen *belleza* (beauty) as the word to represent this and had written it herself on the picture. Alejandra asked her why she, rather than the literacy group participants, had chosen and written the words, and Yezme said that she got carried away and when she had done it with two or three, she felt she had to continue with the rest, although she acknowledged that this was a mistake.

Alejandra presented her poster and explained that she had asked the women to draw what they liked, and the resulting images were much simpler than Yezme's complex stories. But the participants had selected and written their own words and worked collaboratively in designing the poster. The contrast in the two approaches, both different to the modelling in the workshop, demonstrated the variety of ways that any activity would be interpreted and that there was not one correct way of working. This exchange was an important first step in collaborative learning and a striking contrast to standard CONALFA training, where ALFs were told to memorise the steps of a method and to perform them unchangingly.

The modelling of activities was also used to encourage awareness of learning strategies. In creating the significant words poster in the workshop, the ALFs tried to read one another's words, written in Arabic script. They worked together, sharing their recognition of particular letters and supporting each other in reading. I asked them to identify what strategies they had used in reading the words. They recognised that the context of meaningful words had helped and that it was possible to read a word from context without recognising all the letters. Knowledge of the first letter and noting the length of a word were also useful for prediction. But in spite of this recognition, decoding letters was still always the primary strategy and the only one that they encouraged the learners to use.

By the fourth workshop, the collaborative work in the group was well-established. As Avalos & Flores (2017) point out, in order to learn from colleagues there must be mutual respect and trust. It was in this workshop that we moved beyond exchange to collective construction of knowledge through a discussion of good practice.

Hostility to the pilot project from some managers in CONALFA led to repeated inspections, which caused stress and anxiety and stole time from our workshops. In preparation for the first of these, the MLC went through the supervision sheet that she had to complete for class observations. This was to prepare the ALFs for what the inspectors would be looking for. Following this, I asked the ALFs to come up with their own ideas of good practice, partly as a critique of CONALFA's approach. In the first workshop we had created a mind map of the qualities needed for adult literacy work and looked at recommendations, from the Ministry of Education in Ecuador, for what to avoid in teaching literacy (Appendix:7), a list which included points that surprised the ALFs such as:

- Don't monopolise talking time
- Don't forget that participants need to learn through their own effort
- Don't encourage individualism and competition

We returned to these and also read quotes by Latin American writers on adult literacy (Appendix:14). Each ALF selected one that they found particularly relevant and explained to the group what interested them about it. The most popular was:

Illiterate adults are not ignorant; they know many things and do not know others. Life has been their teacher; they have gained knowledge and experience (Lunagomez, 2007:26).

After this preparation, the ALFs worked in pairs to write their ideas of good practice on pieces of paper, which were stuck on the whiteboard. The MLC and I added our own ideas to the collection. Then we tried to make sense of the disparate ideas, grouping them under headings. Inevitably not everyone participated equally. I facilitated the discussion, moving it on with my own ideas when we got stuck. Alejandra and Yezme, the most vocal, contributed more but I tried to include everyone, inviting Dayana and Gabriela, who were still quite reticent in expressing their views, to contribute. This was an initial attempt at collective decision-making, at bringing ideas together that would then be put to use as a format for self-evaluation. The evaluation grid that emerged from this process was used in the following workshop to analyse what the ALFs were already doing well and what they needed to work on.

An important aspect of the pilot programme was the dialogic approach and the opportunity for literacy group participants to express their ideas. Leading discussions that will encourage debate and problematise assumptions is often cited as being a difficult skill (Archer & Cottingham, 1996; Fiedrich, 2003; Nalwonga, 2003). We held a

discussion about leadership in one of the workshops in which the ALFs shared varying interesting views on relationships, participation, guidance and friendship, support and motivating people. I asked about different styles of leadership and about political leadership and this led to contributions about nepotism and corruption. The MLC told us that she tried to use a democratic style of leadership, to be a facilitator, but she also had to establish her authority. We shared ideas in the discussion, but at the end, when I asked them to identify what I had done as the facilitator to encourage debate and enable everyone to participate, they found this a difficult question. I made a list of what I considered good practice in leading a discussion and asked them which of those I had managed to do. These they were able to identify. But this single activity was clearly inadequate for developing the skills of leading problematising discussions.

In the same workshop we had another episode of collective production of knowledge, this time on the subject of group work. We started by thinking about different ways of setting up groups. Initially the suggestions involved random group formations through counting or games, but mixed level and same level groups were also proposed and finally friendship or interest groups were recognised. We took this further through a carousel activity. The title of each of the different kinds of groups was written on a flipchart sheet. Then working in pairs, the ALFs moved around from sheet to sheet, adding new ideas on what kind of activities would be appropriate for each group formation. The MLC also participated in this activity. The ideas that emerged were fairly straightforward but rather than the result of the activity, it was the process that was important. They had not been aware of different forms and purposes of groupwork but by considering the question in this way, challenging each other to analyse and contribute, they had collectively constructed new knowledge amongst themselves.

In the fifth workshop, we evaluated the first unit of the pilot programme. The ALFs had been asked to write their evaluation and bring it to share at the workshop. They had taken different approaches to this task. Most had assessed which activities had worked well and what the participants had enjoyed. Some focussed on what the participants had learned. They commented on the pilot approach itself, the difficulties and the benefits and some addressed their own learning, mostly the realisation that people learn differently and that the participants in their groups bring important knowledge to share with others.

We summarised collectively (Table:2)

Table 2: Evaluation of Unit 1		
What worked	What needs improving	Additional activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socialisation activities</li> <li>• Significant Words activity</li> <li>• Cut up names</li> <li>• Word cards</li> <li>• Reading the student writing booklet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't use wool to make the name labels as this is childish.</li> <li>• A better explanation of the First Sentences activity is needed in the guide to avoid the writing of "example" sentences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work on signatures</li> <li>• Wordsearch activities (making and solving)</li> </ul>

I printed off the reflections for the next workshop so that everyone had a copy of what others had written. After re-reading them, we talked about their literacy group participants' learning and they reported certain difficulties. Sometimes participants could not read back the sentences they themselves had written; it was not always easy to bring oral expression into short concise sentences that could be easily read. Some participants seemed to make little progress and the ALFs were searching for ways to support them. Poor attendance impacted on learning and ideas were shared on how best to work with participants who missed sessions.

For each of the units, we had a list of competencies that we hoped participants would gain and we needed to think about ways to develop and assess them. We chose three from Unit 2: recognise the sound of most letters of the alphabet; understand the content of the national ID card; begin to recognise words in common documents such as electricity bills, birth certificates, school reports; and we used the carousel technique again, to bring out ideas. Many useful suggestions were made, including the use of word cards, focussing on the first and last letters of words, comparing the way the date is written in different documents, recognising the same names appearing on different documents, working in mixed level groups and more.

Over the course of the pilot programme, the ALFs were building knowledge through practice and increasing their confidence in evaluating what they were doing. In Unit 2, they worked on dates and Andrea's group created a table of the months of the year with a particular festival or cultural event for each month. Everyone recognised the value of this activity and it was agreed to include it into the programme guide (Appendix:5).



In evaluating the eighth workshop, I asked the ALFs to use the evaluation sheets that they were using for their own work. For what could be improved, they told me I was putting too much into the workshops; that we should do less but in more detail. I was aware that the workshops were very full. There was not much time, the ALFs were new to the work and there was so much to learn. In working with the pilot methodology, they needed to become familiar with the activities. They needed to understand that literacy is a social and cultural practice, that reading is a search for meaning and writing a form of communication. They had to gain confidence in leading activities and discussions, observing how participants learned. Teaching is a complex process. In defining pedagogical content knowledge, Pryor et al. (2012) mention the importance of acknowledging students' multiple skills and knowledge, the ability to see what students find difficult and find ways of facilitating learning, evaluating how students respond to teaching, planning appropriate activities and offering materials that will assist them in their learning. Teachers need to be able to offer flexible responses to specific contexts.

In working with the ALFs on the pilot programme, I was aware of the importance of taking into account the knowledge and skills they brought to the process. In planning the workshops, I tried to respond to what they reported or I observed as their difficulties in their work with participants. But most important was to create opportunities in the workshops for collaboration and co-learning. However, I acknowledge that their criticism was valid. I planned too much for each workshop and the ALFs felt overloaded.

At the last training and development workshop, we addressed the issue of change. After listening to the song *Cambia, Todo Cambia* (Everything changes) the group shared ideas about change. Gabriela said she was constantly aware of change as she had experienced it so dramatically through marriage and having a child. Yezme spoke of historical changes in Guatemala: colonisation, imperialism which meant that in Guatemala they were used to change. The MLC commented that we often accept and adapt to change that we don't agree with. However, she argued that change was good, and we needed to make changes. Alejandra responded to the words in the song that "love does not change" and she remembered Doña Nidia, who had lost three children. She said it was important to understand the participants better.

I asked them then what kind of changes they hoped to achieve with their participants. Gloria wanted to change the belief that women should not study and for the participants to move from 'I cannot' to 'I can'. Mariana added: from negative to positive, from 'I cannot' to achievement. Alejandra proposed change from conformism to knowing something more, from housewives to women with dreams. Gabriela wanted the women to develop their abilities and to move not only from 'I cannot' to 'I can' but also from 'I don't want to' to 'I do want to.'

I also had my desired changes, which were about literacy education methodology that would lead to better learning opportunities. Through the pilot project and the previous work I had done with the municipal programme, certain dimensions of desired change had emerged: a move from the mechanics of writing as represented by *planas* to writing as communicating meaning; from the performance of teaching to the observation and facilitation of learning; from explanation to dialogue; from schoolification and infantilising activities to problematisation and recognition of adult experience and knowledge.

When I presented these dimensions of change, Gabriela asked with dismay why I hadn't explained this at the very beginning. I tried to explain that my approach understood learning as emerging through practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Lave, 2012; Martire & Lave, 2016). Yet this is not a view that was shared. I had introduced Kolb's (1984) learning cycle at an earlier workshop, asking the ALFs to put the four stages of the cycle into what they considered to be the right order. The cycle was for me a useful schema for understanding how we learn from experience. Yet the ALFs did not recognise this process. They proposed that reflection followed knowledge, it did not follow experience nor lead to knowledge. Knowledge, gained through formal education, was the starting point, which led to reflection and practice. This was the representation of their own learning experiences and followed the discourses often used within CONALFA of putting new knowledge into practice. In this view, knowledge is first gained through study and then put into practice. It had not occurred to the ALFs that experience in the way that I was using and understanding it was relevant to the learning process.

And yet the ALFs had through the course of the pilot written reflections on their teaching experience. They had recognised how they had changed their practice through the experience of working with the pilot project. As Guskey (2002) suggests,

they had changed their ideas of what is good practice in teaching through finding that the activities they were using from the pilot project were enabling learning. But this change did not go far enough to question the doxa of 'learn first and then practice' (Rogers and Uddin 2005), the epistemology of the education system in which they were immersed. Their 'theory in use' was shifting but their 'espoused theory' (Argyris & Schön, cited in Eraut, 2000:122) remained with the *doxa*.

On the other hand, the question also arose of whether my own educational habitus, shaped in the participatory practices of a particular moment in British adult education, was too strong to enable me to adapt my teaching approach to take account of the preferred learning strategies of the ALFs. Should I have adapted my approach to offer structured explanations of the ideas that shaped the development of the pilot programme at the start? While encouraging the ALFs to observe how their participants learned, had I myself sufficiently engaged with the ALFs' ways of learning?

Allan Luke (2012) proposes that 'teacher-centred' forms of pedagogy can be seen as a form of 'gifting', in the pre-capitalist tradition of reciprocity. Explanation is not just an institutional education form, it exists also in indigenous narrative traditions. Bellino (2017) describes the respect that is offered to speakers in Mayan culture. In rejecting explanation in favour of dialogue was I also unwittingly critiquing indigenous cultural practices? Luke suggests a 'weaving' of traditional and dialogic methods, proposing 'classroom interaction as a kind of alternating and shifting zone where relationships around the technology take different interactional shapes' (2012:81). Although not planned, this was perhaps what was emerging as the ALFs shifted between the activities of the pilot and the more familiar forms of exposition.

The most demanding task the ALFs undertook was designing Unit 4 of the programme which would be based on topics chosen by each group. At the start there was some confusion about what was being learned. Gabriella and Dayana's groups had chosen the family as one of their topics. In their first attempt at planning, the work appeared to be a course that taught family values rather than 'family' as a context for developing literacy practices. Yezme's work on women's rights was also aimed at raising awareness of the issue, more than giving space to participants to share their existing knowledge and ideas, before agreeing what further questions they wanted to explore.

After the final workshop, we held an additional meeting to write Unit 4 and ALFs were asked to bring their ideas as far as they had developed them. Gloria had a multitude

of ideas but wasn't sure how to put them into a coherent unit. Alejandra had worked hard on her proposal, which was to create a collection of cooking recipes and she had typed and printed it off. Yezme had written some thoughtful and articulate ideas on women's rights while Mariana had built on a discussion about culture in her group. We tried to find activities that could be used across the topics and drawing on techniques used in the previous units we pulled together a structure:

- Introducing the topic: participants share their ideas
- Poster: participants create a poster drawn from their own ideas on the topic
- Use of word cards
- Discussion leading to writing
- Reading of texts written by the participants
- Writing instructions or advice (to accommodate the recipes)
- Preparation of questions for visiting speaker
- Presentation by visiting speaker
- Excursion or visit followed by writing
- Preparing a leaflet on the topic

Pryor et al. (2012) report that in terms of student attainment, teachers trained through a fast track process in Senegal were as effective as those who had completed teacher training college. In spite of the limited time that was available for training, I would argue that these young women had progressed dramatically in their educational practice and this had been made possible through the collective responsibility to work in a specific way, cited by Avalos and Flores (2017) (see above) as the highest level of collaboration.

Within the traditions of systematisation of experiences, this can be interpreted as constructing collective knowledge. The development of collaborative work in the workshops was an essential aspect of the systematisation of experiences methodology we were working with. In the next section I will present what emerged in the first systematisation workshop.

### **First Systematisation Workshop**

The first systematisation workshop was held towards the end of July. In carrying out the systematisation we were working towards a collective reflection on our experiences of the pilot process, drawing on the contributions of all the ALFs who worked with the project. We hoped to generate new knowledge about the development of ALF

practice, through the systematisation process. The workshop aimed to create “a space where people can share, confront, and discuss opinions based on mutual trust” (Tapella, 2009:25).

We followed the steps set out by Oscar Jara (1997):

1. Starting point
2. Initial questions
3. Reconstruction of lived experience
4. In depth reflection
5. Arrival points

### **Starting Point and Initial Questions**

In carrying out a systematisation of a large or long-term project, a decision has to be made about which aspect will be examined. As this was a small project with eight literacy groups, it was possible to examine the complete project rather than select a particular aspect of the work. We wanted to systematise the collective experience and learning of the team that carried it forward.

The initial questions set the object, objective and axis of the systematisation. The object was the pilot programme. The objective, agreed by the ALFs and MLC, was to analyse what we have learned as a team, how we can improve based on our experiences and to share what we have learned. The axis or focus was the learning of everyone involved in the project: the literacy group participants, the ALFs, the MLC and myself.

### **Reconstruction of Lived Experience**

Eight ALFS participated in the full day workshop which was facilitated jointly by the MLC and myself. We brought together a display of the work done on the project:

- Posters and reading texts created by the groups
- Photos of literacy sessions
- Case studies of literacy group participants written by ALFs, together with the participants’ notebooks
- Comments about the pilot programme made by participants either in writing or transcribed from oral expression
- Workshop plans and evaluations
- Written work produced in workshops
- Written reflections by ALFs, MLC and myself

Everyone browsed the exhibition, exchanging impressions and reactions. There were flip chart sheets available to write comments and questions that would later be discussed together. We then shared our responses in a group discussion that was recorded.

Looking at participants' writing, Alejandra drew everyone's attention to a sentence: *Me gustan los paisajes porque es la naturaleza dibujada*. (I like landscapes because they are nature painted) which expressed a profound thought in simple language. It exemplified the aim of the pilot programme: to encourage participants to express and write their experiences and ideas. Gloria was surprised at the length and complexity of some of the written texts. Alejandra and Andrea explained that participants with some previous experience of reading and writing were able to write more complex texts. They needed support in organising their ideas into a coherent structure and help with spelling and punctuation. Given the opportunity to express their ideas in writing, they advanced quickly. Yezme made the point that women in Guatemala are often silenced, not listened to and the pilot programme was important in that:

We realise that they are given the opportunity to express themselves. And to write down directly what they think, what they like, and even what they feel.

Another theme that emerged was the varied ways that ALFs had interpreted and carried out the different activities. I have described above the different approaches to the Significant Words activity. In the unit on the community, the groups had made maps of the local area. Gabriela noted that while in her and Dayana's groups the participants had made individual maps, in other groups they had created joint poster-size maps. As the ALFs talked about their experiences of making maps in the groups, it became apparent that the literacy group participants had shared and questioned each other's knowledge to create a collective representation of the area. Gabriela acknowledged that this was a better way to organise the activity and that if she were to use it again, she would do it differently. The collaborative approach had enabled collective construction of knowledge within the literacy groups and this was recognised by the ALFs.

Andrea liked a Mother's Day poster created by another group. She concluded that:

Seeing the exhibitions [...] I think that each of us learned something new from each of the compañeras, because each compañera did a different activity and something nice that we liked. So yes, we each learned from these exhibitions a different way of doing what we did.

While Alejandra commented:

We realise that not only what we are doing is good, but what other *compañeras* have done might be a much better method.

The realisation of the value of collaborative learning both in their groups and among themselves was evident.

Looking at the participants' notebooks, we noticed that at the beginning, ALFs resorted to *planas*, often in response to requests from participants, but as they gained confidence in working with the pilot activities, these disappeared. They acknowledged that they had moved on from the traditional approaches they were familiar with and Yezme expressed it well for the group:

I think the important thing in all this is that we all learned. And if we had the opportunity to start again, I think we would do it much better. We wouldn't have it just in writing but as practice and we would improve from what we have seen and what we have shared with the other *compañeras*.

While Campero (2005) and Galván (2008) have noted that schoolteachers working in adult literacy and adult education co-ordinators do not often identify themselves as learners, the ALFs in the pilot programme were able to recognise their learning, achieving Messina's (2005:12) proposal of training as a "space of dialogue where we all act as learners, willing to take risks, to grow and to share."

Following a break, everyone received a length of ribbon and A5 size papers in water related colours. The pilot process was compared to a river and the experiences of each of us were the tributaries that would flow into the river. We wrote



Figure 10: Tributaries Activity

about our experiences of the pilot process on the papers, attached them to the ribbons and placed them on the table to represent the flow into the river.

Everyone then read each other's experiences and comments and this was followed by another shorter discussion. Time was given to write more questions and comments on the flipcharts for reflection in the afternoon.

The difficulty of working with a new approach was identified:

At the beginning I didn't start very well because we started with *planas*, but we have changed the way of learning because now there are not so many *planas* (Andrea).

At the beginning I couldn't find the way to teach the classes (Dayana).

Realising that people learn in different ways was cited:

I have learned that you can learn in different ways and that you can learn from others (Mariana).

I realised that every participant learns differently (Dayana).

Gabriela identified further aspects of learning:

I have learned to be more observant and to give each participant individual help.

Putting into practice the techniques that we saw in the workshops helped me to clarify my ideas and I have put some knowledge into practice.

while Alejandra commented on the impact of the workshops on ALFs' learning and observed how the participants in her group advanced:

It was interesting to see how each of our minds was changing in the way of teaching and how we were taught.

I feel satisfied that after several months of hard work with the participants, nearly all of them are developing fluency in reading and writing. I realise how satisfying it is to see how a small impulse can change everything.

Yezme's tributary, created with a visual immediacy, raised many issues and gave a rich representation of the difficulties that the ALFs faced at the beginning and how through implementing the programme, they grew to understand the ideas it enacted.

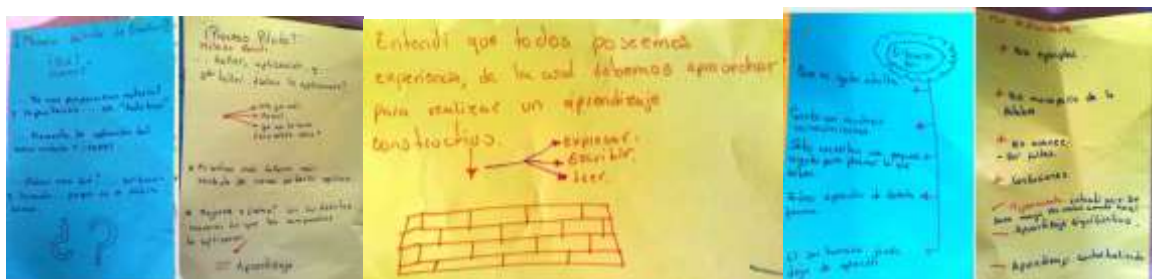


Figure 11: Yezme's tributary comments

Her comments included:

I think that learning happened on the journey.

To understand that things can be done better when we learn to be (experience) and to do (things).



I understood that we all have experience which we need to draw on to realise constructive learning.

They [literacy group participants] are adults, people with a lot of knowledge. They just need a little help to write it down. They all learn in different ways. Humans will never stop learning.

### **In-depth Reflection**

After lunch we had a whole group discussion responding to the questions written on the flipchart sheets. We reflected on the process of learning to use the pilot methodology and how this could be improved; the relationship between theory and practice; lack of time; noting the differences and meeting the needs of individual learners; issues of motivation and how to support learners; making classes more enjoyable; differences between trained primary teachers and other ALFs; relations of authority and my position as a foreigner; visits to the literacy groups; what worked and enabled change and what more could have been done to support development.

The first point that came up was the lack of time. Everyone agreed that the training for the project should have started well before the programme began. Gloria wanted more clarity of what was meant by the 'traditional' method. Having worked with a phonics only approach herself she did not think of this as 'traditional' and did not understand that the pilot was questioning this approach. Alejandra added that it would have been better if the changes that the pilot was introducing had been made clear at the beginning, in the form of aims. Then the group could have tracked the changes that they were achieving. Gabriela compared this to using the self-evaluation form.

I explained that in the training I was also moving away from the traditional approach of presenting information which would then be put into practice and instead creating activities that encouraged them to analyse and draw their own conclusions. This led to a debate on the relationship of theory and practice. Gabriela recognised that they were learning through practice, rather than being trained prior to starting practice, as in the teacher education system some of them had been through. She talked of her personal experience:

When I was studying, sometimes we covered important things for practice but when we were doing our teaching practice, we forgot them. So, when you are already working in practice, you analyse more what is really working and what doesn't work. And if you're not sure, you ask.

Andrea pointed out that if you present the idea or the theory first, people might reject it before they have had a chance to see how it works, reflecting Guskey's (2002)

theory of teacher development. Alejandra suggested that people can get bored listening to theoretical explanations while the workshops had never been boring. The ALFs had moved on with their thinking on this since the final training workshop where they had challenged me on the issue of presenting explanations first.

Gloria raised the question of motivation and suggested that this should have been dealt with at the beginning. The ALFs needed to develop ways of motivating the participants in their groups. Alejandra responded that the relationship between the ALFs and the participants was important for maintaining motivation. She argued that ALFs need to be friendlier and more compassionate with the participants and suggested that this topic should be introduced into the workshops.

Attendance had been a problem with all groups across the municipality this year and the MLC wanted to know how Gabriela and Dayana had managed to maintain high numbers. Dayana immediately replied that it was through visiting participants at home when they didn't come. Participants were grateful for this and explained that once they had missed a couple of sessions, they were embarrassed to come back. But with encouragement from the ALF, they returned. There had been advantages for Gabriela and Dayana working together, as they were able to support each other not only in the group but in terms of visiting participants. They commented on how time-consuming this was, as the women whose attendance was poor were dealing with various difficult situations and while explaining their absence, talked about their problems. Gabriela stressed the need for patience and understanding in working with the participants. Dayana noted that participants encouraged the ALFs to visit those who were not attending. There was concern in the group for the well-being of Glendy, a young woman who was mistreated by her parents and when she missed a session, the other women asked Gabriela and Dayana to visit her.

Mariana reported she had also visited the women at home and confessed that it annoyed her to have to listen to the women's problems. But it was important to show tolerance because they would feel supported and motivated and so would return to the group. Gabriela agreed, adding that the support made the women feel important while Yezme made the point that when the women talk about their problems with the ALF, they feel they are being listened to, while they may not have the opportunity to express their feelings in their home situation. Gabriela raised the issue of the motivation of the ALFs themselves. The ALFs also faced problems which caused stress

and it was disheartening on such days to arrive and find that very few people had come. The administrative demands of CONALFA and the constant threat of inspections, also had a negative impact on ALFs' motivation.

We moved again to the topic of change. Mariana observed that change was happening and suggested that more change was needed. Gabriela was interested in the move from the mechanical teaching of letters to the focus on meaning. Alejandra suggested that it was harder for those who were qualified teachers to make the change as they had been trained to use the traditional methods and the *planas*. She commented that the participants themselves had wanted to work the way that children are taught in school but that eventually they realised that this was not the best way. She had shown them how to learn the spelling of new words by using the Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check (LSCWCh) technique.

Asked if she thought it was harder for the teachers, Gloria replied it was hard for everyone. She talked of her experience of teaching young people and said their approach to learning was different to adults. I reminded her what she had once said to me about teaching the way that you are taught and she expressed again the contradictions that she experienced:

Most of us have learned in the traditional way. So we thought: that's how they taught us, that's how we have to teach. So we have to learn how to learn because sometimes we think that the way they taught us is right and then we realise that it wasn't. But that's the way we learned and that's how we want to teach.

The MLC described how when studying for an MA in education, the only teaching method was lectures even when the subject of the lecture was constructivist education or participatory methods for teaching:

They're telling us how to do it, but we don't use it in practice. We continue sitting at our desks and the teacher talking from the front. So this change is a bit difficult.

Yezme argued that the education system encourages competition, that students learn to become individualistic, proud of their own achievements and envious of others' success. However, she understood that the pilot project wanted knowledge to be shared and that this could lead to change.

We are not just learning, we are applying the knowledge and it helps us. We are learning completely new things.

And the MLC reiterated:

We are learning together. We constructed all this together.

One of the ALFs raised again the question of motivation and Alejandra returned to the point about the interaction between the ALF and the participants, arguing that the manner of leading the session is what keeps participants' interest. Indeed, I never saw anybody bored or inactive in Alejandra's group. Gabriela then offered various examples of how she manages her group, finding tasks for the more confident members to work on, while she gave more attention to the beginners. She used the booklet of participant writing for small group or pairwork. She asked the participants to make a note of any word they did not know. The women had talked about how Ladino people spoke differently and used words they did not know, so this was a way of developing their vocabulary. Andrea shared her experience of working on reading. When the women read aloud, they often had not focussed on the meaning as they were more concerned with decoding. She asked them questions about the text and they had to read again to be able to answer them.

Although the ALFs do not use theoretical language, they reflect on and analyse their experience. As Messina (2015:23) points out, in the process of systematisation

We do not establish an opposition between theory and practice, we move between one and the other from and in experience.\*

Gloria gives a vivid account of how her educational habitus was shaped and how difficult it is to change it. Alejandra analyses and promotes the importance of relationships in the learning process. All have come to understand the value of dialogue in teaching and Gabriela and Yezme in particular have realised that poverty and inequality lead to stress, which impacts on the ability to learn. Yezme uses the Freirean concept of silencing in talking about the situation of the women in her group. Gabriela and Andrea both give accounts of their changing facilitation practices, based on observation of the learning process and reflection on what works. They are developing their pedagogical content knowledge. Yezme critiques the neoliberal discourses that dominate education and proposes an oppositional approach of collaborative learning while Dayana is aware of the solidarity that exists among the participants. Yezme's understanding of learning on the journey reflects Messina's (2015:20) approach to systematisation:

a process in movement which transforms itself into a dialogue of subject and knowings.\*

The trust that already existed in the group and the open discussion format, enabled the ALFs to share tentative ideas and develop them through the dialogue. It was their own forms of knowing, expressed in a way that was meaningful for them.

### Arrival Points

In the final activity of the day we returned to the metaphor of the river. The river representing the pilot process was drawn on flipchart sheets and placed on the table. There were points which represented different aspects of the work:



Figure 12: The River of the Pilot Project

- Rapids: danger, fear and doubt
- Obstructions: barriers, difficulties, problems
- Deep running water: reflection, new learning
- Swimming area: joys and successes

Working as a whole group, suggestions were made that were relevant to the metaphorical points on the river and these were agreed and written on the sheets. The group identified the demands of CONALFA as one of the obstacles. They also mentioned the poor attendance and lack of punctuality of the literacy group participants as another obstacle. Several of the participants had poor vision or required reading glasses, but their precarious economic situations prevented them from obtaining glasses that met their needs. Some of the participants made little progress and ALFs struggled to find ways to assist them. Gloria found the number of children coming to the group with their mothers difficult to deal with and this was echoed to a lesser extent by others. Some ALFs found that the women in their groups did not express their ideas with ease although this was not everyone's experience. Resisting the use of *planas* was also identified as a difficulty. But the greatest difficulty was working with a new approach which everyone found challenging.

The group identified many points of learning. They recognised the knowledge that the participants brought to the learning process and that they learned in different ways. They understood that adult learners must not be treated like children and that they were motivated by writing texts that were meaningful to them. The ALFs had moved

from explanation to dialogue. They had learned how to plan a session using a variety of activities and techniques. They had also become more aware of different purposes and forms of assessment. And they had understood the importance of collaborative learning through their own experience of learning from each other.

The mutual support in the literacy groups was noted as a joyful experience. It was satisfying to work with topics that were relevant to the women and to see them learn and develop new literacy practices and competencies. In contrast to what was stated in the difficulties, here they wrote that participants expressed their ideas confidently in discussion. The ALFs themselves enjoyed working as a team and learning something new.

The mouth of the river represented the conclusions of the systematisation. The initial idea was that each person at the workshop would write one learning point and one recommendation that would be placed at the mouth of the river. However, by the end of the day, there was not much energy or time left so instead we worked together to propose and agree a list of recommendations for improving the pilot and building on what had been learned and these were scribed by the MLC.

The ALFs wanted the programme to be adapted and improved based on their experience of working with it. The guide should be edited, giving examples to make it more easily understood and adding activities created by the ALFs during the programme. They made suggestions for how to improve the visits to the groups, with joint planning taking place before the start of the session. CONALFA required participants to complete a written test at the end of the course and there was concern to prepare an assessment that focussed on the literacy practices and competencies developed through the programme. The ALFs hoped to arrange mutual visits and observations during the final two months of the programme while I was away.

The systematisation fulfilled the four purposes that Jara proposes. There was a rich exchange of experiences, which led to a better understanding of the work. Theoretical knowledge was developed within the terms I have outlined above and there was the potential to improve practice as the ALFs themselves had noted. As Campero (2005) found in the work with adult educators in Mexico (see Chapter 4), the ALFs had changed their view of the participants in their groups, moving from seeing them as needy, ignorant or unwilling to learn, to better understanding the social and political context of deprivation and precarity they operated in. They learned to value the

experience and knowledge that the women brought to the learning process and to a greater or lesser extent changed their ways of interaction with them, reducing their sense of shame and helping to build self-esteem.

Tapella (2009:25) asserts that “the story of a project or experience cannot be told by one actor alone.” In reporting the systematisation workshop, I have tried to bring out the voices in dialogue (Messina & Osorio, 2016), the different ideas and the shared understandings of the ALF team, highlighting their ways of knowing. Their experience of the project was not uniform. Each came with their own capitals and habitus, which shaped their participation and their contribution to the collective construction of knowledge.

In systematisation of experiences, as Messina (2015:14) points out, knowledge emerges from the practice of educators, from listening to each other; moving from a personal experience to a more inclusive understanding. Implicit in the process is the belief that another world is possible, that by reflecting on and analysing personal and collective experiences we create the possibility of transforming those experiences in future action. Systematisation offers:

The possibility of working together as conscious subjects ready for the meeting, the creativity and the dialogue.

## **Final Systematisation**

I was away for three months and returned for the end of the literacy programme. I had hoped to visit each of the groups one last time but most of them were preparing for or doing the final assessment and it was not appropriate for me to be there. I visited only Alejandra’s group later for a farewell event.

The publication of a booklet of participant writing (see p.92) was going ahead and we arranged a meeting to select and organise the texts that would be used (Appendix:11). The ALFs had not managed to arrange mutual visits as had been planned and the MLC explained that because of the constant threat of inspections, they could not take the risk of one of the ALFs not being with her group on the regular days.

Yezme took on the task of writing the introduction to the booklet of participant writing but her first attempt was too formal, using long complex sentences and difficult vocabulary and Mariana helped her to make it more accessible. When a complete draft of the booklet was ready, the MLC reviewed it. She added accents and punctuation that we had missed but she also changed the wording of some of the texts. My

intention had been to reproduce the texts as they were written using the non-standard forms of Spanish spoken by the women in the groups (Gregory, 1991). They did not need to be amended to schooled Spanish. But I was aware that the MLC was reading the booklet with the eyes of our CONALFA critics, who would use 'grammatical errors' as a way of criticising and undermining the work of the pilot. In order to be accepted as legitimate expressions of learning, the texts had to conform to schooled forms of language (Grenfell, 2012).

Our final systematisation was to happen as an 'Awayday' and we had chosen a venue on Lake Atitlán where we would stay overnight. The lake, surrounded by volcanic peaks is one of Guatemala's most dramatic sites and Panajachel, a small town on the lake is a popular tourist resort and a great favourite for day trips. Only the MLC and Alejandra had been there before, although Mariana had once stopped at a viewing spot on the road to Guatemala City to see the lake from afar. She said she had never imagined that she would one day visit it and stay overnight. Our accommodation was in a quiet spot on the opposite shore from Panajachel, just outside a Maya Tz'utujil village. The views were spectacular and when we arrived after a long hazardous drive, the gasps of appreciation were audible. Everyone had to take time to absorb the visual drama and throughout the time we were there, the desire to be out enjoying the environment was greater than the desire to work, to systematise or to learn anything new.

We did an activity where each of us received an envelope and everyone had to write three adjectives, describing each other person, on slips of paper and drop them in that person's envelope. We then opened the envelopes and read out the contents. I have already presented the results of this activity in Chapter 5. It was an affirming event as all the descriptions were positive and although some adjectives such as "friendly" "responsible" or "understanding" were frequent, there was a great deal of variety and originality in the words chosen and many were acknowledged as being accurate.

From this we went on to look at Kolb's learning cycle as a stimulus to a discussion on reflective learning but unfortunately none of the ALFs remembered or related to the cycle with its four phases of experience – reflection – theorisation – implementation, so it did not function as a stimulus to the discussion I was hoping for. Next, I invited them to look at extracts from their interviews which I had printed and put up on the walls. I had selected what I felt were particularly interesting comments about their



own and participants' learning and the experience of collaborative work in the team and this was also intended as a way into a further discussion of these topics.

But I had misjudged again. There was far too much text, over 2000 words and just the sight of it was daunting. None of the ALFs were prolific readers and they did not have the skills of skimming and scanning or the literacy practices that would allow them to browse and select those extracts that drew their attention. Unlike the exhibition of learning materials from the previous workshop, which the ALFs become engrossed in and then discussed with interest, reading the extracts was a task and a challenge, not a way into a discussion.

In my three months in the UK I had at first felt very distant from the discourses of academia, but slowly was drawn into conversations about analysis of data and began to worry about what evidence I had of collaborative learning and collective construction of knowledge. I had moved away from the work with the ALFs, lost the immediacy of the regular interactions and the joint meaning-making that this involved. I was focussed on collecting more data on the topic of collective construction of knowledge. I asked the ALFs about the collaborative learning they had experienced through the pilot. Alejandra repeated her previously expressed view that she considered the workshops a form of study and expressed the value of the exchanges between the ALFs in the process of learning and development:

I see it like this. We arrive there with our *compañeras* and in the studying, apart from getting on well, each one of us exchanges her experiences and each of us can say what we have achieved and what we have not achieved. And what I have not achieved, maybe someone else has. You can get help from what someone else has done to learn and do it better next time.

Andrea linked the learning and the idea of a community of learning with the participants in the groups:

I think that as well as seeing in another's work what we were unable to do, or getting ideas from another *compañera*, perhaps we are a learning community because it goes with the women and us, it's all of us perhaps. We are all a learning community, the women and the ALFs.

So reminding us that the primary purpose of the pilot was the learning of the literacy group participants and so bringing to our awareness the layers of learning that were emerging.

The MLC made the comment that when the ALFs shared their experiences in the workshops they were listened to:

Everyone could be confident to express and tell what they had done because they were not going to be judged. On the contrary, your comments and the experiences that you had would be taken into account.

Yezme took up this point, reiterating her earlier analysis of competitive discourses in education and added that the pilot team were not selfish in this way. Collaborative learning was a new experience for her. She suggested that they had also learned from their mistakes:

We learned to share our experiences and we also learned from our mistakes. Because I have to stress that I didn't always do things the right way. We interpreted and applied it in our own ways.

Andrea reported the satisfaction the ALFs felt in being able to share their achievements:

I think that the training workshops were really useful because each of us shared the activities that we had done so that we could do it better and it was really nice to be able to share what had worked well.

And they gave specific examples where they had seen something done differently by another ALF and thought that if they were to do that activity again, they would do it in that way. In this brief discussion, the ALFs were able to articulate what they had learned and how the collaborative work in the pilot team had enabled this.

The discussion did not last long. The literacy programme was over, the participants had taken their tests and mainly passed. Some of the team had already decided that they would not continue working with CONALFA and it was all over for them. We had come to a beautiful place, they wanted to enjoy it, not dissect their experience of the pilot project. I had to let go of my research agenda. The lake was calling and we went down to the shore. Later we took a boat to Panajachel and spent the afternoon exploring that side of the lake, returning after dark with the wind rocking the boat.

The next morning, we had a final discussion about our pilot programme. Recognising that the project would not continue, that they would no longer work as a team, I wanted to hear what they felt they had gained from being involved and where they would take the new knowledge that we had built together.

Yezme started. For those who are teachers, she argued, they are used to working to a certain pattern and here they were working to change that, but that change was not easy. She stressed that everyone has knowledge and that they should use this knowledge. Listening to others was important: "it's better to listen to other people's

ideas to open the field of knowledge.” She had shared her experience of the pilot with friends she had studied with who were now working as primary teachers and they had used some of the ideas from the pilot when teaching children to read. She was also planning to work with her primary school age cousins, to experiment with using the approach she had learned on the pilot with them.

Mariana had also found the change hard but claimed that she was now practising the new method with a child, to good effect. Dayana was confused at the beginning but slowly began to understand what the pilot was attempting to do. She had enjoyed teaching but expected to go back to nursing, which she had trained for. Prompted by Yezme, she agreed that what she had learned was useful in supporting her nieces and nephews with their school work. None of their parents had studied beyond primary school and so it was difficult for them to help their children. Dayana had come to be known as the teacher in the family.

Andrea stressed the importance of reading and writing for meaning. “I’m taking away this idea of meaning,” she told us. And if anyone ever came to her for help with literacy, she would use this approach. She told us about a woman who came and asked her to teach her, to set her some *planas* and Andrea explained that she would not learn through *planas* but through something that had meaning. She made the link to her own learning, that if she was studying, she would learn better if the subject meant something for her, was linked to her own experience. So it was good that the participants had learned what they wanted and what they were interested in.

Alejandra brought in the idea of personal development:

We focussed a lot on the development of people around us, who sometimes have closed minds and we learned that we could help them but not that we were going to do it for them, only to help them to open their minds beyond what they think their limits are.

And she compared the team to flowering plants that had been nourished by the MLC and me and would continue to grow and flourish though the programme had come to an end. She suggested that when Dayana returned to work as a nurse and was asked to give a talk on a health topic, she would do it differently, interacting with the women. She didn’t know what she herself would do the following year, whether she would continue with CONALFA or not but what she did know was that everyone had to be treated equally because we are all equal and have the same value. She argued that if

she returned to study, her participation in the project would be an asset for her and she argued that it would be useful for all the team:

Because we learned to research, we learned to analyse, we learned to develop, we learned to conceptualise because we did it all together.

And she concluded that we may often change our minds in our lives as we learn new things.

Gabriela agreed that there were aspects of the project that were valuable in any job. She recalled that when she first started, she thought it would be very boring teaching adults to read but in reality, the time went fast. Sharing with people you didn't know before was an unforgettable experience. The ALF team were all good people and there were no problems in the group. Her husband had warned her that there were always difficult people and tensions in work groups but that hadn't been the case here. She had also started using aspects of the pilot approach with her nephew, who was not doing well at school. She had shown him how to use the LSCWCh technique and observed that he was himself noting and correcting his mistakes. He was learning through his own effort. "If I hadn't been in the pilot programme, I would have taught him using the traditional method (*planas*) but this is much better," she told us.

The MLC also commented on the cohesion in the team:

We didn't have any problems. Nobody said I'm better than this person or better than that person. Everybody brought their experiences and everyone learned from each other. Nobody was the boss here, nobody was subaltern, we were all equal. Of course there are hierarchies, but they weren't marked in the sense of being an overseer. Rather we all worked with the enthusiasm of doing our work as well as possible.

And she added to Alejandra's comments on Dayana's work as a nurse, suggesting that Dayana would use more active and participatory approaches in health promotion, allowing everyone to talk and express their ideas to construct new knowledge. She herself would also use such an approach if she moved into teaching in higher education. She urged the ALFs:

So let's put it into practice, so that it doesn't die here but that you will continue to build on what you already have.

I also shared some comments with the group. I told them that after collaborating with CONALFA over five years, it was the first time that I felt that my work had made a difference, because through their commitment, enthusiasm and mutual support we were able to make something happen that had not been possible in previous years.

We were able to show that dialogic education can be introduced and made to work. The situation of CONALFA had made things difficult for us but in spite of this, working as a supportive group, we were able to resist the pressure and achieve something important.

Alejandra responded that they were fighters and optimists. They had started the project with many doubts and questions but they ended up changing their way of thinking and for herself, she added that she had learned to accept criticism because the way it was done was constructive and it helped her to improve.

Mariana, having listened to everyone, now had some additional thoughts to contribute. She had started the programme with confidence, thinking it would be easy, but she had received criticism both from myself and the national inspectors and had felt undermined by this. But she agreed that they had to be fighters because we will always encounter obstacles in our lives and have to deal with them. As women, we will face problems at work and at home and will have to be strong. The solidarity in the team was what made it possible to carry on and this was an enriching experience. And she thanked the group for their friendship. They would all be going in different directions but taking something important with them.

Yezme compared the journey of the pilot project to the road we had travelled to the lake, with its twists and turns, its paved and dirt sections, its steep slopes and dangerous potholes. She confided that she was quite a reserved person and it took some time to build trust both with the ALF team and with the participants in her group. The ALF team was welcoming, and she was able to connect and open up. She had learned something about herself in the process:

In this process, I realised also that it allowed us to find out something that we did not know about ourselves. Because through the socialisation activities we got to know each other better in the group. "Oh, so that's what they think of me." [...] because we know ourselves as we think we are, not as others see us.

And she also expressed the hope that what we had learned and experienced would not die there but be taken forward into other contexts.

Andrea added:

The greatest satisfaction was to see the women learning and that they have gained confidence. It is a great satisfaction for all of us.

Finally, Dayana wanted to thank everyone for accepting Gabriela and her with their daughters. Normally it would not be possible to bring your children to work. And then she broke into tears. She was grateful that the MLC had never made difficulties for them because of the children. Working as a nurse she had suffered abuse from other members of staff. She did not state it specifically, but I suspect that these were racially motivated incidents. Usually there was always some bad apple in every workplace, she told us, but here it was not like that. She always felt supported:

I am very happy because I have learned a lot and you develop as a person through this process, you become more mature.

Dayana's tears touched us all. It brought the discussion to an end but the feelings she had expressed stayed with us.

## Reflections

The discussion showed how we had all been part of a process of becoming. As Alejandra said, we had all developed our abilities in research and analysis. In spite of the challenge of changing ingrained ways of working, of shifting the *habitus*, the ALFs recognised the value of the contextualised, relevant, communicative approach to literacy education. They had observed how, by using the activities of the pilot method, they had been able to facilitate the learning of the women in their groups. They had watched them develop. They rejected the traditional methods of *planas* and copying and understood that learning is realised through our own efforts. Zúñiga et al (2015) argue that by questioning existing practices we can transform them, while Torres Carillo (2010) points out that analysing our experience strengthens the practices we have developed. Although most of the ALFs would not continue to work with CONALFA, they planned to use these newly developed practices in other future contexts.

The discussion clearly demonstrated the power of the collective. In a society with deep fissures of inequality: economic, ethnic and gender, these young women had found in this group a democratic space where they were not classified but expected to work together in a spirit of equality and solidarity. It had taken a little time to build the trust and accept constructive criticism but the hostility of the CONALFA inspectors acted as a catalyst in strengthening the sense of a group identity.

Tapella (2009:25): argues that the process of systematisation gives power to those who participate in it, giving them space to speak their experience, to share their developing knowledge:

Through the interpretation and the telling of the project's story, we are putting the power of the story's reconstruction on the ones that were involved and that is one of the key contributions and the richness of systematization.

The opportunities for exchange, for learning from one another's experiences, for working together on new ideas, led the ALFs to value their own existing knowledge, the skills and creativity that they brought to the project. The stories that they told of their experiences, the collective generation of knowledge had increased their autonomy (Messina & Osorio, 2016). The systematisation enabled them to look more closely at how the project had developed and increased their understanding of their place within it (Bickel, 2005). We had let our practice speak and tried to promote participation "as a way of being in the world where equality and respect for diversity are integrated" (Messina, 2015:19).

As Bickel (2001:1) states:

As humans we can transform reality and through this transformation, we will also transform ourselves.\*

However, in the wider context, the pilot project was positioned within the adult literacy field through CONALFA and this position shaped and limited how the project developed. The fact that the work would not continue was directly impacted by the situation in which we were working. I will look further at the pilot project in the context of the literacy field in the final chapter.

## 8. Looking Back and Moving On

### **Emerging Knowledge**

This study addresses the gap in knowledge about the educational development of ALFs in the Global South; very little has been written about the lived experience of ALFs. The thesis, responding to the overall research question of how adult literacy facilitators develop their practice, offers a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of how a group of seven ALFs, working for a municipal adult literacy programme in the Western Highlands of Guatemala, started out on a pilot project and over a period of eight months navigated a complex process of learning and development. The thesis presents a detailed account of the difficulties they faced, the changes they made and the events and processes that enabled them to achieve these changes. In working with the methodology of systematisation of experiences, the practice-based knowledge that emerged through this research, embodied in those who participated in the pilot literacy programme, is dispersed and lives on in the different directions they have taken. In this conclusion I summarise what emerges from the research that could be usefully shared with others working in comparable contexts. Messina (2015:33) asserts that the validity of systematisation of experiences lies in the response of the reader:

The validity of what is presented is about resonance or “reverberations” which follow an unpredictable pattern. There exists the possibility that these will evoke in the reader their own history, enable them to think themselves, learn and change.\*

### **What ALFs bring to their work**

My first research question deals with what ALFs bring to their work: their prior experiences and values, their understandings of adult learning and the role of the ALF. The ALFs who formed the project team had some common characteristics. They were all young women who had completed vocational secondary education. Their experience of education had shaped their implicit views of what a teacher’s role is (Eraut, 2000) and their understanding of literacy education was based on the rigid mechanical phonic approach that they had experienced as children. But beyond this general similarity they all brought their unique histories, dispositions and values to the project, which shaped the way they engaged with the programme. Their vocational studies and involvement in social action brought specific skills and experiences that they drew on in the new work. Those who had trained as teachers were more confident in their abilities at the start of the programme but also struggled the most in



adapting to an approach that questioned the methods that they had been trained to use. The ALFs brought political ideas of women's rights, indigenous rights and national development, Christian values of compassion and humility, modernist ideologies of rescuing people from ignorance and neo-liberal discourses of self-improvement to the work. The impact of these is evident in how they engaged with the programme. As in the teacher education literature (Akyeampong and Stephens, 2002; Pryor et al., 2012), this confirms the importance for the trainer of being aware of the knowledge and values that newcomers to adult education bring to the role, the need to draw on these in the training and development process; and in supporting the ALFs, to find ways of responding to the specific situation of each one.

The ALFs all came to the work with a commitment to the communities that they were placed in and worked with. This was a key factor in enabling change as they were interested in finding better ways of supporting the women in their groups to learn. Messina (2005) stresses the importance of valuing this commitment as well as the knowledge that ALFs have of the local situation. However, the research has shown that CONALFA rarely acknowledges these valuable contributions to the work.

### **Literacy group participants' positions and gains**

My second research question relates to the literacy group participants: their situations in their communities and their positions within the adult literacy field; how they interacted with each other and the ALF in their groups and what they gained from the project.

The participants in the literacy groups were also variably positioned within their communities and their responses to the literacy programme were shaped by these. Each literacy group developed its own forms of working that emerged from the way the ALF interacted with the group, the dialogic strategies that she worked with, the dispositions of the participants and the collaborative ethos that developed in the group.

The starting assumption of the pilot project was that the women joining the literacy groups came with extensive experiences and knowledge. The dialogic methodology of the programme encouraged them to express their ideas and the discussions in the literacy groups clearly evidenced the depth of local knowledge. Participants also brought existing literacy practices that they had developed through informal, independent methods or retained from earlier experiences of schooling. As many working in the tradition of New Literacy Studies have noted, such skills and practices

are not usually taken into account in literacy classes (Robinson-Pant, 2000; Papen, 2001; Kalman, 2003; Rogers & Uddin, 2005).

Those who join an initial literacy class run by CONALFA in Guatemala, are put through the process of learning the letters, irrespective of their existing familiarity with written texts. As the project ALFs came to recognise the existing and emerging practices of the participants, they started to offer appropriate support, enabling the women to develop their writing and create communicative texts and also build their capacity to find meaning in the reading of texts. The community research projects: interviewing women about their views of literacy classes, learning about environmental issues, discovering the history of the local area or exploring and sharing knowledge of traditional medicine created a context for further development of literacy practices.

The MLC, who visited both the pilot groups and the groups working with a different methodology, was able to compare the approaches:

The difference is quite marked. From working in a dynamic participatory group to going to a school style class where the participants sit at their desks, facing the board and the ALF says: "repeat after me" and "copy what's on the board." "Give me one word" or "come out to the board" while the rest are sitting, in another world. [...] I have seen the change from one programme to the other.

She also noted that the participants in the pilot groups, who were given the opportunity to analyse the topics they were discussing, expressed themselves, saying what they thought and eventually writing it down, whereas in the other groups, participants hardly spoke; the ALF did most of the talking, transmitting information. And they continued to work with *planas*.

In disrupting this classic form of teaching, where participants are positioned as ignorant, blamed for their lack of schooled literacy and infantilised in a classroom style setting, the pilot literacy programme enabled the women in the groups to recognise and value their existing knowledge and to extend it through the community research projects. The groups developed mutual help and solidarity, breaking down the shame that is produced by this positioning (Gardener, 1974; Torres, 2000; Bartlett, 2007).

While claims to transformation would be unrealistic, increased confidence and self-esteem were apparent and the published texts of the women who participated in the literacy groups are evidence of their developing ability to express their ideas in writing (Appendix:11).

## **Learning through the programme**

My third research question is the broadest: What is learned through the process of the pilot programme? This is broken down into five sub-questions, four of which I address here:

- How do ALFs engage with new teaching methods and practices?
- How do ALFs articulate their own learning?
- What forms does the collective construction of knowledge take?
- What emerges from the systematisation process?

ALFs engaged with the new pedagogy in different ways. Those who were trained teachers were more resistant to the changes. In Bourdieusian terms their habitus was shaped through the experiences of their teacher training programmes and in questioning what they had been taught, they risked undermining the cultural capital of their studies and qualifications. Others took hold of the methodology more readily, but each interpreted it in different ways. Through the dialogic processes encouraged in the training and development workshops, the ALFs began to compare and evaluate each other's work, developing their ability to reflect on the processes of learning they witnessed in their groups, extending their pedagogical content knowledge.

The introduction of Systematisation of Experiences (SystEx) as a research methodology is, perhaps, the most powerful aspect of this research. This methodology ensured that the training and development process with the ALFs took a collaborative approach, with a recognition from the outset that change is enabled through collective action and responsibility. As important as the work of the trainer, are the relationships and interactions among the ALFs. Workshop activities such as jointly agreeing guidelines for good practice, exploring methods for groupwork or designing new activities developed the expectation of building knowledge collectively, a key tenet of SystEx. The workshops created a collaborative space in which the ALFs were able to explore ways of working with adult learners, to develop their educational practice and to begin to challenge the doxa of the teaching methods promoted by the institution that they worked for.

The collective construction of knowledge was taken further through the systematisation workshops where we jointly participated in a series of activities and discussions to assess and analyse our experiences of the pilot project. The contributions made by the ALFs are evidence of their ability to analyse and articulate

what they have learned through the experience of the pilot project. Given the dialogic space to share and explore their ideas, they moved to expressing their theoretical interpretations, gaining more awareness of their own personal and professional development. In the final systematisation workshop, they identified the long-term impact of the experience which they would carry with them to other situations. The process of systematisation also gave them the confidence and resources to critique the literacy education methods of CONALFA and other problems of the organisation.

### **Impact of the Adult Literacy field**

The final part of the third research question addresses the issue of the adult literacy field: how does the context in which they work impact ALFs' practice?

As in many under-resourced contexts, lack of time was a continuing issue in the pilot project. The MLC's workload and the problems she was facing within CONALFA meant that she was not able to dedicate as much time to the pilot as she would have liked to. Lack of time limited the training that was offered to the ALFs and so conformed to the much-criticised practice of adult literacy programmes making unrealistic demands on ALFs in relation to the training and resources offered (Youngman & Singh, 2003; Messina, 2005; Rogers, 2005; Rogers & Street, 2012). The adult literacy benchmarks (Archer et al., 2005) recommend substantial initial training as well as ongoing professional development with the possibility of regular exchanges between ALFs. While we were able to offer the latter to some extent, the late start and the cancellation of the initial training were a real problem. Lack of time for in-depth discussions after literacy sessions was another issue.

In designing and piloting the new literacy programme, we worked with the hope that if the pilot was successful, it could be extended, the following year, across the whole municipality, to include all the literacy groups and possibly also piloted in other municipalities in the *departamento*. The ALFs who had worked on the pilot would continue to develop their practice further and form the core of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) absorbing newcomers into the culture of dialogic educational practice. The newcomers would move from the periphery to the centre over time in a process of absorbing and being absorbed into the collective ethos. This change would benefit literacy group participants, enabling them to develop relevant literacy practices. However, staff at departmental level were not interested in supporting the programme and this further development did not go ahead. As Campero (2005) found for the

adult literacy institution in Mexico, and Verdugo & Raymundo (2009) have noted in Guatemala, CONALFA's priorities are based on achieving numerical outcomes rather than offering a relevant learning experience to the participants in their programmes.

The ALFs encounters with CONALFA inspectors had an important impact on the project. Mariana's report of the way she had been treated by inspectors created a strong sense of team identity in opposition to CONALFA hierarchies. A long, self-promoting intervention by the same inspector at a municipal ALF training session, furthered the critical position. The pilot ALFs began to see themselves as resisting the doxa of the national literacy programme. In discussing these experiences, they became more aware of the way they were marginally positioned within the organisation with no access to decision-making. They realised that their work and the experiences and professional practices they had developed were not valued. They were subjected to discourses of control, implying that they could not be trusted to carry out their work without regular surveillance. The demands made on ALFs by the organisation are onerous in relation to the pay and the support that they receive. This leads to many of them leaving the work, as Gabriela and Dayana explained in their interview. The following year, only two of the ALFs, Mariana and Alejandra continued to work with CONALFA. Messina (2005:71) calls this "throwing training out of the window."

The research shows that ALFs are treated as expendable. There is no policy or strategy to develop a professional approach to adult literacy by investing in the training and retention of ALFs. The thinking seems to be that if there is a good instruction package ALFs can be trained to deliver it and that is enough. The best packages are the ones that are 'teacher-proof'. There are contradictions between ALFs being told to follow the steps of the packages without deviation while at the same time being encouraged to be creative. There is no attempt to train ALFs to observe and reflect on how participants learn, or to develop autonomy as educators.

## **Ethical Issues**

Dangers lurk in the 'messy swamp' (Schön, 1995) of practitioner research. In my dual role of researcher and educator, moving between observer and actor, continuously making ad-hoc decisions about forms of participation, I inevitably made errors of judgement in the course of the research. I have tried to maintain a reflexive position

in reporting the research, presenting some of the complex dilemmas that I encountered.

After completing a draft of the thesis, I made a short visit to Guatemala in April 2018 to meet again with the MLC and the ALFs who had participated in the pilot project, and to present a summary of the main points of the thesis. I met individually with the ALFs to share in detail what I had written about them in chapter 5. Later, we also met together and held a group discussion about the pilot project.

I met first with Yezme, who was unable to join the group meeting. She read the transcripts of her interviews and then listened attentively as I interpreted into Spanish what I had written about her work and her group, nodding in recognition and accepting and acknowledging the critical points. She was continuing with her law degree but had also done cover in a primary school. She wanted to share with me an experience that showed how she was continuing to use the ideas of the pilot project. While teaching the topic of the environment, she had asked the children to draw a picture. At first the children were wary, telling her that they usually copied pictures that the teacher drew on the board, but on Yezme's insistence they created their own images. A child drew a representation of a mine and explained that the mine was good because it offered jobs to local people, but it was also bad for the environment. Yezme felt that, like the adults she had worked with, children too have far more knowledge and understanding than they are given credit for in schools. She told me that she had been aware before that people learn in different ways, but the pilot had given her tools to address this and she was able to connect the theory to practice. She suggested that the ideas of the pilot project were spreading outwards like links in a chain.

Mariana invited me to her home for our meeting, where I met her family for the first time. She was concerned that I had portrayed her as more vulnerable than she was and gave me additional information about her background, which I have incorporated into the text. Mariana has continued working with CONALFA and is now in her fourth year as an ALF, committed to continuing with the work. She is currently working with a group of men employed by the local water company and I accompanied her to one session with the group. She had brought the booklet of participant writing we had published, from which they read extracts. They then shared and wrote their own stories. As they expressed doubts about their ability to write, Mariana encouraged

them, saying that they would learn through doing. She told me proudly that she now assists in the training of other ALFs.

Alejandra had read her interview transcripts before our meeting. As I interpreted what I had written, she laughed at many of the points in the story as they brought back memories. She told me that I had captured it well and that it reflected her experience of the project. Andrea on the other hand was more pensive. She had hoped to continue with CONALFA and her family had even gone to the trouble of moving the *pila*<sup>27</sup> out of the room where her group met, to create a bigger space. But she had not been able to find enough people to join the programme and so did not continue. She is now studying law and is engaged to be married. She made some corrections to the sections that I had written about one of the women in her group, Erlinda, but told me that she did not remember her own contributions to discussion that I had cited. The pilot programme had ended a year and a half ago. She had moved on.

Gabriela was going through a difficult pregnancy and was unavailable, but Dayana joined us for our final get-together. She read Gabriela's and her interview transcripts and told me that they brought back many memories. She listened to my translation of the text about their work, smiling nostalgically, and made a few minor corrections. Neither she nor Gabriela were continuing with CONALFA, for the reasons they had explained at the end of the project.

It was difficult to contact Gloria and by the time we did, it was too late for her to join us for the final group meeting, but I met her later at the CONALFA office. This was a more difficult meeting, as our interaction, which I had written about, was complex and troubled. As I shared it with her, I was aware that this was very much my interpretation of events. Although her words were there, I had analysed them through my own understandings. She asked me about the meaning of symbolic violence and when I explained, she recognised its impact in her life, that in the hierarchical structures within which she is placed, she is subjected to symbolic violence by those who are in positions of power, but she can also inflict it on those she has authority over. She repeated the expression thoughtfully and I wondered if she would start to observe its manifestations around her. Gloria got ready to leave; she had to catch the last bus back to her village. I wanted to talk more, to engage in a longer exchange, to

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<sup>27</sup> A structure built from concrete for washing clothes

explore what the pilot had meant to her, but there was no time. The conversation, like those we had had on the bus journeys, was cut short by circumstances.

This final meeting raised questions for me. Had Gloria benefitted from her participation in the research or had she been subjected to the indignity of being studied? (Lather & Smithies, 1997). Had the struggle between her existing knowledge and practices and the opposing approaches offered by the pilot project, enabled her to take her thinking about education further or undermined her confidence as a teacher? She had not felt supported by the ALF team and I had failed to solve the difficulties with her group that she had turned to me for help with. In sharing with her my analysis of our interaction, had I offered her a new perspective that would develop her own understanding of that difficult time, or had I further undermined her? Lacking the time for an in-depth discussion, the question remained unresolved. It was problematic too that Gloria, who had missed the final systematisation in 2016, was also unable to attend our final group discussion. Her perspective, and possible dissent were not included in the final stages of the systematisation.

I return to Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) questions, set out in Chapter 4, about the position of researchers from the North working in the global South:

- Whose research is it?
- Who owns it?
- Whose interests does it serve?
- Who will benefit from it?
- Who has designed its questions and framed its scope?
- Who will carry it out?
- Who will write it up?
- How will its results be disseminated?

Although I initiated the research and owned it at the start, the ALFs who became the pilot team took ownership of the research in different ways. When I met with Yezme, she suggested that one of the reasons for the success of the pilot was that all the ALFs had chosen to join it, they welcomed the opportunity for additional training and brought a commitment to the work. I shared this later at the final group discussion, which Yezme could not attend, and the ALFs agreed that this voluntary participation was important in developing an identity, a sense of becoming together; "unity" and "sharing" according to Andrea, through "constructive support and criticism," according



to Alejandra. Mariana announced that they had made the project their own; Alejandra repeated this, and the others agreed.

The statements that the ALFs made at the end of the project showed that there were benefits for them and the participants in their groups. They were continuing to use aspects of the pilot practice in their current roles. The research could have had wider impact if CONALFA as an institution had also taken ownership of the research, but this did not happen.

I started with research questions that focussed on ALF development in relation to the pilot programme, but the questions changed as the project moved forward, reflecting the wider processes that were at work: the experiences and values that the ALFs brought, the power of the collaborative experience, the stories and voices of the literacy group participants. In this way I did not carry out the research myself, the research and the knowledge that was born from it developed collectively.

Although I have written a doctoral thesis based on the research, I am not the only one who has written about it. The MLC has submitted a report to CONALFA about the work; she and I have written a joint article to be submitted to a Latin American journal and we are planning to publish more information online. Alejandra wrote a description of the pilot for a presentation to other ALFs in the municipality.

The MLC has delegated responsibility for some of the training offered at monthly municipal meetings to Alejandra and Mariana, who continue to work with CONALFA. They lead the training for the ALFs working on initial literacy while the MLC leads the training for the ALFs who have 'post-literacy' groups. They bring their experience from the pilot project to their new training work. It is likely that the collectively constructed knowledge emerging from the pilot programme will be disseminated more effectively, along chains, as Yezme suggested, through the informal networks of the ALFs and the MLC rather than by the online publication of my thesis.

## **Implications for Policy**

At the final discussion of the pilot team, during my visit in April 2018, the ALFs recalled the pilot and what they considered its most important elements. They commented on the activities and discussions in the workshops; the mistakes they had made at the beginning and the changes they achieved over time; the difficulty at the start of persuading the literacy group participants that doing *planas* was not the best way to

learn; how much they had learned through sharing ideas and discussing together; how the participants in their groups had learned and gained confidence; the value of the support through the visits to groups and the self-assessment that was part of this; the importance of the systematisation process; the significance of the booklet of participant writing.

Then they moved on to discuss the problems with CONALFA. They commented that many CONALFA staff had closed minds and didn't want to teach adults in a way that was right for them. They undermined the ALFs instead of supporting them. Resources were inadequate and ALFs had to spend their own money on materials while receiving inadequate pay. Things had got worse over the four years that Alejandra and Mariana had been working as ALFs. Too many people left because they needed to find better paid work; they could not afford to spend five months between programmes without pay. Alejandra, Mariana and the MLC expressed sadness at losing good colleagues. Every year the training starts from scratch because most people are new, meaning that those who have been working for a few years gain nothing from the training. The MLC critiqued CONALFA's approach to class observations as assessment, compared to the approach of visiting groups for support.

They began to formulate their ideas on what was needed to change this. Mariana argued that the pilot ALFs should sit down with the CONALFA managers to discuss, to explain their experience and the ideas that they have developed through the pilot programme and their continuing work. Their new knowledge gave them authority on the subject; they know what works and what doesn't and what needs changing. The authorities should listen to them and take up their ideas. Andrea took up the theme:

To explain to them how different it could be to teach people in a way that is meaningful for them, so that they could see what we have seen, that [participants] learn when it's something that interests them, not something that has to be taught because it's in a book or because it has been done like that before. [...] I don't know what we have to do to make them [CONALFA] understand, to see how it is to learn in a different way with something that [the participants] like, with something that is important for them and which is part of their daily life.

Half-jokingly, the ALFs talked about organising a national strike but they knew they could not do this as they are unable to join a trade union. They were aware that change would only come through collective action, but they were not in a position to act on this. Mariana made her demands clear:

CONALFA is a national institution and it should be better organised, working together to make changes for the people. Many people need literacy education and so there should be an effective institution that can serve the people.

Literacy group participants had also made valid points related to policy change. Doña Aurora's message to CONALFA that basic education should be made available to adults, and young people who have dropped out of school, reflects the continuing situation of inadequate access to relevant schooling. The shocking levels of inequality and poverty in Guatemala, as pointed out by Doña Nidia, prevent a large proportion of the rural indigenous population, particularly women, from gaining basic literacy capabilities. Funding and resources for adult literacy and adult education more generally, have been squeezed and rather than progress, regression is apparent (UNESCO, 2013; 2016). A basic literacy programme will not have an impact on the structural problems of poverty and inequality. What could be achieved through the pilot was minimal in the face of these forces.

The commitment that ALFs have to their communities is the strongest asset of the national literacy programme. The ALFs need to feel that their work is valued by the organisation they work for, that the organisation is willing to invest in their work rather than exploit it. As long as ALFs are treated as expendable human resources, who can be trained at the beginning of each annual programme to administer a literacy education package, there will be little progress in adult literacy education, no matter how good the selected package may appear. What is needed is a proper employment contract and a continuing professional development programme. As many writers have pointed out (Campero, 2001; Archer et al., 2005; Messina, 2005), ALFs should be trained and supported as valuable education practitioners, offered equivalent pay to schoolteachers and enabled to offer a literacy programme that is relevant to the adult learners in the communities where they work.

## **Compañeras**

While staying at the lake during the final systematisation workshop, some of the ALFs mentioned how old they were. As we compared ages, I realised that all the ALFs were younger than my daughter and I said spontaneously "you are all like daughters to me" reflecting the affection that I felt for them. But then I paused: "no, not like daughters." I had never treated them like children, they agreed, yet like most parents I still fall into the trap of sometimes treating my adult son and daughter like children. Friends? asked Mariana. This was not quite the description. I did not see them

outside our work on the project or share personal issues and problems with them. *Compañeras* was the right word. We had worked together, for several months; we had shared our achievements and frustrations in the work; we had worked hard and supported each other to make the project succeed; we had shown that change was possible; we had built trust and affection and learned together in a continuing process of becoming.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: The Catechism of the Polish Child

Kto ty jesteś?	Who are you?
Polka mała.	A Polish child.
Jaki znak twój?	What is your sign?
Orzeł biały.	The white eagle.
Gdzie chcesz mieszkać?	Where do you want to live?
Między swemi.	Among my people.
W jakim kraju?	In what country?
W Polskiej ziemi.	On Polish land
Czem ta ziemia?	What is this land?
Mą ojczyznę	My motherland.
Czem zdobyta?	How was she won?
Krwią i blizną.	By blood and scar.
Czy ją kochasz?	Do you love her?
Kocham szczerze.	I love her truly.
I w co wierzysz?	And what do you believe in?
W Polskę wierzę.	I believe in Poland.
Coś ty dla niej?	What are you to her?
Wdzięczne dziecię.	A grateful child.
Coś jej winna?	What do you owe her?
Oddać życie.	To give my life.

Władysław Bełza, 1890

## Appendix 2: Work carried out with CONALFA 2011-2015

Date	Work
Apr-Jun 2011	Voluntary work with municipal literacy programme. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class observations</li> <li>• Collaborative work with 1 literacy group</li> <li>• Participation in ALF training and development workshops</li> <li>• Delivery of one development workshop for ALFs</li> </ul>
Jun-Jul 2012	Research for MA dissertation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory research workshop with ALFs</li> <li>• 4 Focus groups with ALFs in different locations</li> <li>• Interviews with Departmental Literacy Co-ordinator and 2 Municipal Literacy Co-ordinators</li> <li>• Documents and teaching materials review</li> </ul>
Jan-May 2013	Delivery of development course for ALFs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 development workshops with ALFs</li> <li>• 40 class visits</li> <li>• Collaborations with 15 ALFs and their groups</li> <li>• 10 interviews with ALFs</li> </ul>
March-May 2014	1 <sup>st</sup> year of PhD research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 development workshops with ALFs</li> <li>• 22 class visits</li> <li>• Collaborations with 6 ALFs and their groups</li> <li>• 5 interviews with ALFs</li> <li>• 11 interviews with staff at CONALFA national office</li> <li>• 2 interviews with CONALFA trade union representatives</li> <li>• 3 interviews with people protesting CONALFA policy</li> <li>• 5 interviews with representatives of local NGOs</li> <li>• 3 interviews with local politicians</li> </ul>
Jan-May 2015	2 <sup>nd</sup> year of PhD research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 development workshops with ALFs</li> <li>• 40 class visits</li> <li>• Collaborations with 11 ALFs and their groups</li> <li>• 9 interviews with ALFs</li> </ul>

### Appendix 3: Narrative work before 2016

#### Elisa

When I gave Elisa the narrative I had written about our work together the previous year, she didn't say much, other than to point out that I had got her qualification wrong. I had understood that she had completed bilingual secretarial studies but this was not the case. It was in fact administrative secretary. I was most interested in her reaction to the way I had written about her Mayan identity and the bibliographic references that I had included. We eventually talked about it when I interviewed her at the end of our second period of collaboration. She told me:

I think these were important to describe me... because we shouldn't forget my origins, my way of being, the way I dress. So I think it's important, to describe me like that.

I wondered too what she made of being categorised as belonging to the Maya elite. She had found this interesting because "sometimes you don't really identify what you belong to." She acknowledged that her parents weren't peasants as they had a small business and accepted that the concept of Maya elite "fits with my personality." Later she told me about her year as a Maya princess or queen. She was elected to represent the workers' organisation where she was employed as a secretary. During their year of office, the elected princesses are invited to a great number of fiestas and parades where they take part in the festivities wearing their regional costumes. Elisa participated in 75 such events in her year as the organisation's princess. In the photo below, she and other Maya princesses pose with Rigoberta Menchú.



These Maya *Princesa* or *Reina* celebrations came into existence in the 1930s but during the 1970s they became opportunities for political statements. In 1977 a K'iche *reina* called for pan-Mayan unity in Guatemala. In 1978, after the massacre of protesting indigenous *campesinos* in Panzós, a group of Maya princesses refused to take part in a national folklore festival. Instead they travelled to the capital to make a press statement. They called for the suspension of the folklore festival, "an example of oppressor *indigenismo* that makes the *reinas indigenas* into simple objects for tourists to look at". In various places young women used the events to condemn the Panzós massacre: one pronounced the unforgettable words: "*Hermanos de Panzós, su sangre la tenemos en la garganta.*" (Konefal, 2011)



Elisa does not describe her values as political. During her time working as secretary for a workers' organisation she told me she had learned to deal with different people but did not make any reference to her political views.

It could be the way of understanding people, to put yourself in their place. Because it's not easy to say well I have to deal with this person even though I don't like them, because that sometimes happens. So I learned this there because sometimes there are people who treat you badly and others who love you. And you have to treat them equally because in the end it's your job.

Elisa told me that her year as a Maya Princess was a beautiful experience and a memory that she will never forget. Her pride in her Maya identity which she took from her mother was strengthened by the experience:

...because my mother always talked to us in K'iche. She always said it was good to learn both languages, that they will be useful. She said don't be ashamed of the *traje* because, she said, it's more expensive. (...) But we shouldn't ignore (*descartar*) that [my identity] was strengthened more when I participated because... you speak K'iche, because I am wearing indigenous dress and I am here in this place

I suggested that the experience must have increased her self-confidence. She agreed, telling of how she became involved in celebrations of the anniversary of the founding of her secondary school. But she did not link this increased confidence to her role as an ALF. Yet I would argue that it is important. Throughout our dialogues about the work, the theme of confidence, authority or even control reappeared in different ways.

Before, in the first year, I couldn't perhaps dominate the group. I couldn't come and work with them because the first difficulty that I had was that I was practically the same age as them. Or sometimes I had students who were much older than me. So I said how am I going to come and tell them to do something if I am younger than they are?

But now I have learned that no... and to impose things. I'm the boss here. To at least maintain the position that here I am the ALF and tell them, let's do this, let's collaborate... maintain that position...

At the end of the interview when I asked Elisa for recommendations for my work next year, she suggested tentatively that I needed to assert my authority more with the students:

For example, the group we had this year was a bit bigger, it was a bit like more difficult to keep them in silence because they're always talking, talking. So, no, maybe try, like I said last time to speak to them a bit more strictly.

Elisa also teaches children in her local church as a volunteer. She told me that she brings that experience to her work on the literacy programme.

We believe that young people and children should always be respectful, collaborative, understanding... all those values (...) and I have always spoken with the participants (...) I always tell them: you should respect, do this, collaborate, don't make fun, support each other. With the participants a little bit harder because since they come from different places, have different

situations, apart from the fact that since they are adolescents they get in lots of trouble, don't they? so I always try to speak to them.

While last year, I had observed Elisa's classes and then we had discussed them together, this year we agreed that I would teach a part of her class every week and we would discuss this. It is important for me, in my work of supporting ALFs, to try out some of the approaches and activities that I am sharing with them, in their classes. I want to have the experience of working with their groups, to discuss and evaluate with them the activities I am trying out. I also hope that where a session or an activity works well, it will encourage them to use that activity themselves and more generally to experiment with new ideas. Where something goes wrong, by discussing the reasons, we reflect together, so encouraging a reflective approach to the work.

We had agreed with the co-ordinators that following on from the writing projects I had done with groups last year, we would try to collect a wider range of participants' writing from all groups to publish as a booklet for use in literacy classes next year. In relation to this we wanted to encourage Elisa's class to produce different written texts for the collection and this work would be linked to some of the content of the Language and Communication textbook.

(Kalman, 2002) working from a New Literacy Studies perspective, critiques the decontextualised approach to language work common in Latin American school textbooks. She cites the use of decontextualised example sentences and exercises requiring the identification of the tenses of isolated verbs. She argues that this approach fragments the language and tests formal grammatical knowledge rather than communicative competence.

CONALFA's Language and Communication textbook book has 5 units which illustrate this very problem:

1. Basic Grammar
2. The sentence
3. Some forms of expression (including dialogue, narrative and description)
4. Reasoning of reading (including the writing of stories, myths and legends with appropriate sequencing and poems showing an understanding of line, verse and rhyme)
5. The importance of reading (including summarising a text)

Each section starts with definitions and explanations written using a formal style and vocabulary which is not accessible to the participants. Later there are exercises to test the understanding of the explanations. The idea of our project was to link some aspects of grammar from the first part of the book to the writing activities in the second part. Luke (2012) argues that traditional 'teacher-centred' forms of pedagogy can be seen as a form of 'gifting'. He suggests a 'weaving' of traditional and dialogic methods, proposing 'classroom interaction as a kind of alternating and shifting zone where relationships around the technology take different interactional shapes' (p.81). Working within the framework of the traditional curriculum, we would try to weave in more interactive, contextualised writing activities and this might give students the possibility to 'convert and subvert the gift of writing – rather than reject it.' (p.89).

Four such weavings were proposed:

- Writing short texts about themselves and their interests, focussing on sentence structure.
- Preparing questions for an interview focussing on question structure.

- Writing a poem for Mothers' Day celebrations.
- Describing a special place focussing on adjectives.

This approach was a little strange for Elisa who would normally work her way through the textbook in the order in which it appeared, following a banking model of education (Freire, 1996). She would simplify the explanations for the participants and then ask them to do some of the exercises. This form of working has become integrated into her habitus.

Explaining the concept of habitus, Bourdieu states:

I wanted initially to account for practice in its humblest forms – rituals, matrimonial choices, the mundane economic conduct of everyday life, etc. – by escaping both the objectivism of action understood as mechanical reaction “without an agent” and the subjectivism which portrays action as the deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention, the free project of a conscience positing its own ends and maximizing its utility through rational computation (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 121).

What happens in the classroom can be interpreted as a humble practice through which habitus is expressed. Elisa and I both brought our teaching habitus to this collaborative situation and this habitus was affected by our experiences of working together.

(Thiel, 2013) in a reflexive critique of her own habitus as a teacher educator writes:

At its best, teaching is difficult. It is a mix of trial and error, informed evaluation, past experiences, and split second decisions. Often we are caught between our pedagogy and finding ourselves entrenched in the profound experiences of human interaction (p.293).

In preparation for my first visit Elisa asked the participants to form groups according to their interests and to prepare a short presentation. They would introduce themselves to me in groups and talk about their interests and then later they would ask me questions about myself. The group met in a school classroom off a patio where they and other groups took their breaks. The room had no ventilation and the door was kept closed to shut out noise. The 30 or so participants sat on chairs with writing boards, arranged in rows and columns filling the whole space. It was just possible to move between the chairs. Elisa had a small table and a chair squeezed into a corner at the front. When I arrived, the door was closed as the group was working. As the door was opened for the break, a wall of stale air blocked my entry.

When the class restarted, somebody brought me a chair and I sat at the front near Elisa. As the groups were to start their presentations there was some confusion about where they would stand. I thought they would speak from where they were sitting while they had obviously envisaged that they would come to the front. There wasn't room at the front for a whole group to stand. The group of boys whose interest was football was very large. If they were to present from the front, I would have to sit somewhere else. In the end Elisa suggested they stand where they are and do the presentation.

By the end of the session I realised that this had not been the right solution. A small group of young women who had chosen television as their interest topic had made a model of a television from recycled cardboard and polystyrene, as a prop. Stuck in their corner of the classroom, they were unable to bring it out and use it as part of

their presentation. They showed it to me after the class. Other groups had also produced visuals which they did not include in their presentations. This work, carried out specifically for this occasion, for my benefit, was not acknowledged or valued. This form of presentation, standing at the front, greeting everyone before starting, showing respect for the listeners, which I had encountered in different situations in my work in Guatemala, could be understood as a gift.

I used sentences from their presentations in the following lesson. I cut the sentences up and asked them to reconstruct them in small groups. I then gave them a short unpunctuated text based on what I had told them about myself the previous week in response to their questions. My reciprocal gift was in written form. They had to divide this text into 5 sentences. Then they moved on to writing their own texts about themselves.

In the interview at the end of our collaboration Elisa told me that she had been nervous the first day that I taught her group because she wondered if I would be able to control them. After the class, she said that the participants had enjoyed it and learned but that it was a bit complicated. We noted the mistake I had made when I asked the participants to put away the reconstructed sentences before we had done the planned recognition of verbs and nouns. I recognised that I had planned too much for the time. She also told me that I needed to speak louder which surprised me as I had felt that I had been shouting too much of the time.

The participants had struggled to write their short texts. Elisa suggested that they had not been able to organise their ideas, while I noted that expressing themselves in writing is not part of usual classroom practice. We both hoped that that this would change. In her own notes on the collaboration, Elisa wrote that she believed that through the process, they would be able to "express all ideas as they think them."

The following week they remembered the cut up sentences, which was a previously unknown activity but didn't recall that they had written texts. We continued with the process of trial and error, preparing questions for interviews. The class was in early May and I had found an interview with 2 women workers in the paper on 1<sup>st</sup> May. I thought this would be interesting for them and I asked 3 of the participants to read it aloud for the class. This time I knew to invite them to the front. But they were not familiar with the dialogue format and struggled to understand who had to read when. Their weak reading fluency meant it was not really possible for those listening to make sense of the text. I had used a familiar participatory approach, but this resulted in the exclusion of the other participants who could not follow the meaning. If I had chosen a presentation mode, Elisa and I could have read it, enabling everyone to understand.

When we moved to group work to select a known person to interview and prepare questions, it took a long time for the young people to get organised and start on the activity. There was confusion about what the task was. Some wrote the answers as well as the questions. But two groups produced some interesting work. One prepared questions for the president about crime and legalisation of marihuana while another group wanted to interview Barack Obama and asked why he didn't want to pass a law about migration and why the US had killed Osama Bin Laden.

When we discussed the class, Elisa suggested that the participants didn't have the imagination to prepare an interview while I thought it was my mistake for not explaining it properly. We talked about the amount of time that was wasted and she said we needed to be tougher with them. I had noticed that when the level of noise became loud, she shouted *silencio*. I preferred to ask them to focus and allow others

to work. When people spoke as their classmates were presenting their questions, I asked them to respect others in the way they would like to be respected themselves. Telling people to be silent is outside my habitus. It is unthinkable. But I did find myself shouting above the noise.

Symbolic violence, "the *violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 167) is painfully visible here. These young people are enclosed in a small room with no ventilation, performing a series of activities designed and led by someone who has not consulted them, and they are shouted at when they don't follow the instructions they are given. Yet they are complicit in this domination. They regularly give up their Saturdays to subject themselves to this process. Generally speaking they follow instructions and collaborate in the activities. They accept the authority of the teacher, myself or Elisa. They show respect in the language they use to address us. They sometimes express gratitude.

The session on poetry threw up a new range of issues. I came with the assumption that everyone has some experience of poetry. They may not know the vocabulary of *verso* (line) *estrofa* (verse) or *rima* (rhyme) but they will know them in practice. They listened with interest to a song, *Las Manos de mi Madre*, by Peteco Carabajal and Jacinto Piedra, sung by Mercedes Sosa and although hesitantly, through a process of eliciting, showed they were able to interpret the symbolic meanings in the words. Looking at poems from the textbook they worked on identifying rhymes. But when we came to writing poems for Mother's Day, there was confusion about the meaning of 'writing.' A number of the group wrote out poems about mothers that they had learned previously. One young woman wrote out a poem, without using the structure of line and verse, as though it was a prose text. A group of young women sat together clearly unable to imagine how to begin the writing of a poem. An older student sitting next to them, who I remembered writing a poem last year, knew at once what to do and quickly composed a short poem. One of the group then copied out his poem and brought it to me for comment.

How complex is the facilitation of learning. How much prior knowledge of the learners is necessary to offer a meaningful learning experience. How elusive those moments when a group are fully engaged in an activity that interests and challenges them and leads to a sense of having learned. As Thiel (2013) puts it:

The reflexivity of pedagogy is an ongoing, complex, and never-ending circle spiralling back and forth on itself. Even with the best of intentions, we may fail to attend to what is before us (p.301).

The most successful session was where participants wrote about a place that was special for them. They first visualised it with their eyes closed and then drew it, talked to a partner about the picture and after reading another descriptive text and identifying the adjectives and the topic of the 3 paragraphs, they did their own writing. Elisa led the class as this was an activity that we had done in a workshop with the ALFs last year. It was interesting to see how absorbed the young people became in drawing the pictures. Far more time was spent on this than I would have allocated so there was less time left for the writing. But the writing was done willingly, with an apparent interest in conveying something that was important to the participants. Elisa asked those who had completed their text to come to the front. They showed their picture and read their text. Although I would not have thought to do that, I saw that it worked well, that the young people were happy to present their work to their classmates, sharing with them their feelings about a special place.

In her notebook Elisa wrote about the class:

Participation of the group in the activities that were realised. It's interesting to see the development and advance of learning that they have had during these days that we have worked with Marta. They wrote many lovely texts about the place that they imagined or had visited.

In the final session we had together, we decided to do a writing workshop, to give the participants an opportunity to look at the different texts that they had written during the 5 weeks of our working together and to redraft at least one to submit for publication in a booklet of student writing. We got a blank response to this suggestion. Some of the participants did not have the earlier texts that they had worked on. The idea of looking at some writing and redrafting it, was an alien idea. There was no interest in going through this process. But eventually some of them started to write. They wrote new spontaneous pieces, without integrating into their writing those aspects of language we had tried to introduce through practice. They brought their efforts to Elisa or me for checking and we made suggestions on how to improve them. Some redrafting did go on but the process with so many participants was chaotic, uneven and exhausting.

By the end most people had written at least one piece. Texts were displayed on the walls and everyone had the opportunity to read others' work. We gave them three stars each to stick on their favourite pieces and then those that had been awarded most stars were proudly read by their authors. The voting process was animated, and the presentations were appreciated. But we had not re-captured the creative energy of the previous class in the writing process.

Elisa put it like this:

Today in our last class in Marta's company we worked on written texts by each of the participants; but sadly today we could not demonstrate better work, which they had done last week.

Elisa collected the participants' work, typed it up, scanned the pictures and put together a booklet. She wrote an introduction expressing her own understandings of literacy education:

I hope that this [booklet] will be useful for ALFs and participants who have this material in their hands. The intention in producing this is so that all of you can realise that you are capable of achieving everything that you set out to do and support other participants through your experience and learning. You should never give up. Fight every day to break the chains of illiteracy.

In the interview at the end of the process, Elisa talked about how her practice had developed.

When I started work, I had my mentality. I'm going to go and teach and I didn't present the topics in a way to lead to a discussion. I was always, let's talk first, we finish the topic, we do the exercises, we write in the notebook and everyone's happy, right?

Now I pay more attention to the young people. I let them talk about [...] what they already know and I also show them that I'm interested in listening to them. [...] So I learned that they have to have their own participation and they need to show that they can do things.

[...] So I have learned to listen to them. Something that I didn't do at the beginning.

She reminded me of our interaction last year when I observed her classes and suggested that she could encourage the participants to discuss the topics to share their ideas before reading the textbook. She also mentioned the value of writing activities that she had encountered in workshops.

When I asked her which aspects of her practice she would like to share with less experienced colleagues, she explained:

The key [...] is to take the participants into account and to change the activities, not to maintain a routine which is always the same [...] because the students despair, get bored, are not interested. Instead I can, for example, do a guessing game where they can practice descriptions [...] varied activities and being aware of participants' life experiences because these are things that help you to make your class innovative, so that it will be new every time, because, just imagine, every participant has different experiences. [...] And another thing I have learned is that you have to call them by their names. They feel good when you use their names [...] they feel that now she knows I am here, right?

Bourdieu suggests that habitus can be changed through education or training:

Habitus is not something natural, inborn: being a product of history, that is of social experience and education, it may be *changed by history*, that is by new experiences, education or training (which implies that aspects of what remains unconscious in habitus be made partially conscious and explicit)... They may be changed by historical action oriented by intention and consciousness and using pedagogic devices." (Bourdieu, 2005, p.45)

Woollen & Otto (2013) argue that shifts in teacher habitus can be achieved, though only slowly and laboriously. In their 5 year study of White teachers working in predominantly Black schools in the USA, they found that collaboration with an arts project enabled some of the teachers to change their habitus from perceiving the lives of their students as problematic to recognising them as creative young people and acknowledging the strengths of their families (Woollen and Otto, 2014).

This development that Elisa describes could also be understood as a change of habitus. Elisa identifies a specific situation, a discussion about putting into practice what she was learning in workshops during the first year of our collaboration as leading to a new realisation. She has since gained new experiences through trying out a wider variety of activities and our work together this year has given her further opportunities observing, experimenting with and discussing new ways of working.

This year a decision was taken that nearly half the national adult literacy budget would be allocated to 6 provinces with the intention of declaring them free of illiteracy. The provinces selected as most likely to reach this target were those with small, predominantly Spanish-speaking, populations. The rest of the country had their funding slashed. Funding for Post-literacy 2, the level that Elisa was teaching this year was cancelled so she had to make a choice as to whether to abandon her group or work as a volunteer. At a meeting with a local academic and journalist who had been involved in Maya politics, she explained her decision:

In my case because of my commitment to the young people (...) I said I can't go and tell them that we won't be able to have classes because we had already made the commitment. (...) So this year I am working as a volunteer with the young people but I'm doing it because of something that I don't believe is worth it.

Elisa and her ALF colleagues are also subject to symbolic violence: not consulted on any aspect of the programme, forced to respond to the increasing demands of paperwork and now working unpaid. Yet their commitment to their learners and their belief in the value of literacy education, ensure that they comply with the demands. Elisa describes how it is:

Sometimes they demand lots, lots, lots and give very little. We don't work just for the wage, but you know if you're working it's because you need a bit of money. And in the literacy programme you start work and they don't pay you for one month or two months and that's how it goes. But yes, they tell you: bring your report, bring this, keep your group going, work, things that they tell you and it's a bit difficult.

### **Antonieta**

This year quite a few literacy groups were set up in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES). MIDES distributes the *Bono Seguro*, a monthly payment of 300 quetzals to mothers of the poorest families. As part of the programme, the mothers are required to attend a variety of educational meetings run by the ministry and for each group there is a volunteer *Madre Guía* – Guide Mother whose job it is to make sure that the women know about the meetings and attend them. The women are also encouraged to attend literacy classes and where a *Madre Guía* has the required minimum qualifications, she can become an ALF.

Antonieta explained that she had become a *Madre Guía* (MG) by accident because the man whose job it was to assign the role couldn't find the women who had been recommended and came to Antonieta's house. He asked if she would be interested in doing it and she said yes without thinking. She told me:

Porque yo me siento bien ayudando a las mujeres y más a las que lo necesitan. Entonces por eso es que yo me metí a ese proyecto y lo acepté.

She also said:

hay madres que no saben escribir y a veces necesitan que escriban su número de DPI y entonces en eso les ayudo yo también. Entonces por eso me ha gustado bastante.

Later when I was already working with her, I asked her what previous experiences she brought to the work. She told me that when she was in primary school "*no podía*" (she couldn't do the work) and nobody had encouraged her or supported her to show her that "*sí, podía*." (yes, she could). On the contrary, teachers ignored the children who found the work difficult, while her school mates humiliated her. Her parents had said "*si puedes, pero no quieres*" (you can, but you don't want to). These experiences had taught her how important it is to encourage people and she has done this with her own children.

During my first visit to her class with the municipal literacy co-ordinator, I was introduced as someone who would come and support the class on a regular basis.



This had not been discussed with the group and I felt uncomfortable that this was announced rather than suggested and negotiated. But both Antonieta and her participants responded positively and my next visit was arranged for the following week.

This year CONALFA was using a pack called ABCDEspañol which consists of plastic *fichas* with pictures and words, a participants' workbook and instruction sheets for ALFs. The *fichas* are useful as a resource but it seems a bit limited to use the pack as a complete teaching method.

At the first visit, Antonieta had just received her packs and they were being opened and set up. She divided the class into two groups: the real beginners and those who had basic literacy skills. The beginners were asked to cut the shapes of letters out of a thin foam while the more advanced group were working with the *fichas*. After a while I suggested that the beginners' group should have a look at the *fichas* too and pick out any words ending in 'a' as this was the letter they were working on. I wanted to create some minimal context for their letter work. They were quick to recognise the letter a at the end of several words but when asked to name the word, they used the picture clue but did not transfer the sound of the letter 'a' from the decontextualised individual letter work they had been doing, to the context. So one of them named the sheep (ovejA), goat (chivO) and the crutch (MuletA), stick (bastON). That was interesting to observe.

During the next class I did what has become a standard activity of the '*gafete*'. I showed everyone how to write their names using mini whiteboards. They copied their names on the whiteboards, erasing mistakes and continuing until they were satisfied with what they were producing. They then copied their names onto cards which they hung around their necks. These were their *gafetes*, or name badges. We went outside and did a number of activities where they identified different letters that were common in their names. Later we collected up all the *gafetes* and everyone was invited to find their own and then try to recognise some of the other names.

After this activity, Antonieta led the rest of the class introducing the letter 'n'. They looked for words with the letter 'n' in the *fichas*. I suggested that they think of other words beginning with that sound and they were able to do so but at the end they were asked to write lists of na ne ni no nu in their notebooks. Later I suggested to Antonieta that instead of writing decontextualised syllables into their notebooks they could perhaps identify a word starting with each of those syllables: eg: *nada, nene, nido, no, nube*, so putting the syllables in context.

At the end of the class I asked the participants what they had enjoyed most and one said quite decidedly 'writing our names' and there seemed to be general agreement on this so I was pleased.

I also suggested to Antonieta that she should not separate the participants who are at a more beginning stage from the others. If they are doing separate work they will always be behind. They need to be working on whatever the group is doing and they can catch up with the earlier work as they go along. Antonieta had expressed right from the beginning that she was worried about how she would manage with a group who were at different levels.

Antonieta had attended a two-day workshop run by CONALFA on how to use the ABCDEspañol teaching pack. I asked her what she thought of the training and she told me that she had liked it but

fue muy poco tiempo para las técnicas porque hay cosas que uno necesita más preparación, como enseñar la 'h'. Eso es muy difícil y yo en ese día me di cuenta, que es demasiado difícil enseñar. Entonces más ideas de cómo enseñar porque uno puede tener una idea pero si no funciona esa idea, hay que buscar otra idea, entonces eso es lo que faltó más.

She thought it was important to follow the method as set out in the instruction booklet. porque no mucho se confunden las personas. Son letras que pueden reconocer fácilmente. Y son sencillas para escribir y pronunciar. Entonces por eso es que yo prefiero ir así con la técnica.

In some further activities that I led with Antonieta's class, I encountered resistance from the participants. Doña Rosa, a strong-minded woman who is also a *Madre Guía*, challenged me when I was asking participants to identify certain letters in their names, saying how can we do this if we haven't studied those letters yet?

For Mothers' Day we had planned to create a poster. This was an activity that I did with all the groups I was working with and had varied results. We started by asking the group to share ideas about Mothers' Day, what it meant to them, why it was important etc. The first contributions were about presents and cakes. Then Doña Rosa gave a little speech about the importance of the mother's role in the family. As I waited for more contributions, Doña Rosa impatiently indicated that enough had been said so I replied that I was waiting for those who had not yet spoken. In the end everyone said something. As they spoke, I made a note of the key words that had emerged and then we worked together to see which of these words we could work out how to write. They used their whiteboards to write them. Some were easy and it seemed that the participants were pleased to have worked them out. But a few were more difficult: *responsabilidad* (responsibility) was one of them. Although we got the spelling in the end, it took a while and it became clear that some participants had had enough. Doña Rosa in particular was unable to hide her frustration. Again, she questioned how I could expect them to do this when they had not studied all the letters.

The next step was for each participant to write something on a piece of paper that would be stuck on the poster. This suggestion was not well received. It took a lot of encouragement and cajoling by both Antonieta and me to get them to write something for themselves. Eventually Doña Rosa wrote *amor a los hijos* (love of children) and one of the other women wrote "*mi regalo es ser madre*" (my gift is to be a mother) which I thought was a poetic comment and a good example of the kind of things that could be written. When I drew attention to what the participant had written, the rest of the group showed no interest.

When finally all the writing was done and the poster completed, I asked them to gather round so we could celebrate their work. There was a silent refusal. Eventually a few came up one by one and had a go at reading the texts on the poster. It was a very disappointing ending.

After the class, I asked Antonieta why the activity had been such a failure and she explained:

Porque hay... son muchas palabras desconocidas que a ellas les está costando demasiado. Entonces yo me pongo en parte de ellas porque son personas que (...) tienen otro idioma y que les está costando escribir y aprender a leer. Y hacer oraciones completas. Por eso es

que ellas se sienten tan impotentes como si ellas dicen: no puedo, no puedo, por eso es que yo me imagino, que por eso no les llamó la atención hacer eso. Porque les está costando bastante.

This was a valuable observation. It made me wonder to what extent it was possible to combine the systematic approach of introducing one letter at a time and then constructing or attempting to read only words with those letters with the contextualised approach focussing on meaning that I was bringing to the group.

We talked about this. I said there is a contradiction between the instructions to follow the method and what CONALFA says about being creative. Antonieta agreed that it's confusing. She told me that in one of her classes a woman had muttered that she wasn't doing it right and this scared her so she decided to go by the book. Antonieta has a wonderful relationship with her participants, very supportive, with moments of humour. She is aware of the varying needs of the different members of the group and we talked about these issues.

Towards the end of my stay I became unwell and had to cancel some class visits. I worked only once more with Antonieta's group. I felt that they saw me as a kind of alien presence. I had not managed to establish a relationship with them as I had with some other groups. When I see how much they struggle with the learning, it doesn't seem easy to move them to dare to express their own thoughts in writing. One woman, Doña Romelia who often speaks K'iche to the others in the group, always starts any task by saying that she cannot do it. Antonieta has to give her so much encouragement to persuade her that she can.

This year as I had only been able to offer 3 workshops for the ALFs, I had focussed very much on demonstrating practical activities and techniques that could be used in class and avoiding any theoretical content. Antonieta planned to use some of these activities after my departure and hoped to have some writing by her participants to be published in the book of student writing that was being planned for next year.

Antonieta had enjoyed working as an ALF and would like to continue next year but since the period of literacy classes finished in July and would start again in February or March, she needed to find other work during this period and if she found a job, she would not give it up to come back to CONALFA the following year. I hoped for her that she would find a job but I also hoped that she would be back as an ALF next year.

The day before I was leaving, Antonieta phoned me, very excited, to tell me that she had done an activity with her group where she had asked everyone to draw a picture and write something that was important to them and that they all managed to do it, even Doña Romelia who drew a bird and wrote that God created birds because without birds, there is no rain. Antonieta was so excited, she wanted me to see what they had done, she offered to come into town and bring the work for me to see. This wasn't going to be possible so she read me some of the texts over the phone. You could hear the excitement in her voice. I was so touched, so excited too for her and with her that she had done it without any support from me, that it had worked really well, that the women had become engaged in the process and she had these wonderful pictures and texts as the final product. It was a wonderful final point to my work that year, a great gift to receive.

Although I encountered Rancière's work on Ignorant Schoolmasters much later I found that some of what he argues is implicit in my educational practice. He points out that formal education overuses explanation and that this produces stultification. Children

learn to speak their first language without any formal instruction by “listening and repeating, by observing and comparing, by guessing and verifying” (Rancière, 2010, p.5). He proposes that we can learn anything through a similar process, giving the specific example that someone can learn to read if they have a written text which they know the content of, such as a prayer or a poem. By making comparisons, guessing and verifying, they can work out how the letters represent the known words.

A woman in another literacy group told me how she had learned to read through necessity. She had never been to school and as a young teenager went to work for a family as a live-in childcare worker. She told me she had to be able to recognise the word *leche* on the container where the powdered milk was stored. And so she worked out the letters for those sounds. She carried this process over to other written words in that domestic environment and so developed the ability to read simple texts.

The approach I bring to the literacy classes is based on this premise. If participants write their own names, they can work out the sounds of each of the letters in them. Then they move on to other significant words and so build up their knowledge of the letters from the context. Rancière proposes that the teacher’s responsibility is to encourage and enable the student to realise their capacity and continue their intellectual journey which commenced with the learning of their first language.

But in Antonieta’s group, the women resisted this approach. Rancière argues that the learning process may be rejected “because the student does not think it possible or necessary to know any more” and this is explained by the fact that “The ignorant one holds the opinion that intelligences are not equal” (p.5) but he offers no explanation of why people have developed the opinion that their intelligence is not equal to others.

Freire argues that oppressed people have been submerged in a culture of silence and only through a process of *conscientização* can come to read the word and the world. Rancière rejects the idea that education can empower or emancipate people. I also doubt that emancipation or empowerment can be proposed as an outcome of education, and particularly not by an outsider coming into an unknown context. The results of human agency are unpredictable. Empowerment does not emerge in expected ways and cannot be planned for. What is learned in the education process is not always what is expected.

Rancière takes equality as a starting point, not as an aim. Yet the intense inequalities produced by Guatemala’s colonial and post-colonial history cannot be ignored, nor does Rancière address the structures of gender inequality. When the women in Antonieta’s class resist the approach to learning which demands that they work things out themselves, and want learning to be made easy for them, this is as much an expression of their physical exhaustion and inadequate nourishment as well as what is often named as “low self-esteem” by literacy co-ordinators and development workers in Guatemala.

In a recent paper on vulnerability and resistance Butler (2014) presents the importance of the idea of “support” (p.9). She argues that the performance of gender or other identities depends on the infrastructural and social conditions of support. Bodies are not as separate as they might seem. The body is “defined by the relations that make its own life and action possible” (p.5). We cannot talk of a body without knowing what supports that body and what its relation to that support – or lack of support might be. There is dependence on other human creatures, and there is vulnerability in not being supported.

Butler argues that vulnerability is not an existential condition and should not be seen in opposition to agency. She stresses the importance of 'naming' in the process of performativity. Naming, especially of gender, starts early in our lives, before volition. We may ask "Am I that name?" but this comes later. This exposure to naming creates vulnerability. A speech act can be agentic but it also acts on us.

Participants in literacy classes are 'named' illiterates. Before this they will have been named as poor, ignorant, as girls not needing education, "Indian" or other derogatory terms for indigenous people. These acts of speech have acted on them, creating vulnerability, imposing a culture of silence, disabling the capacity to learn that they demonstrated in learning their first language.

Something moved in the first year I worked with Antonieta. In the interview at the end of our collaboration, she explained how she had changed her way of thinking about teaching and used some of the techniques we had modelled in the workshops:

yo tenía la mentalidad de otra forma como a nosotros nos enseñaron eso lo de ensañar, enseñar, enseñar sin tener sentido a veces las palabras. Pero entonces por eso si me ha ayudado demasiado sus técnicas. He puesto algunas técnicas en práctica. Y me han funcionado. Ahorita ya van avanzando la mayoría con las letras y entonces si se les ha quedado con esas técnicas.

Like most of the ALFs that I spoke to, she had been very anxious when she started. She didn't know how to approach the teaching of literacy and she didn't have the teacher's guide at the beginning so had to guess how to use the materials. The training and support offered to ALFs is limited, so she was pleased to have me come and help in her classes:

Fíjese que a mí cuando me dijeron que si quería dar alfabetización yo sinceramente me puse a orar desde el primer día que me lo dijeron que me diera la paciencia y la sabiduría para enseñarles a ellas. Y Ud. cayó allí. Ay como bendición de Dios. Entonces si me ayudó demasiado.

In spite of the anxiety at the beginning, she found that she enjoyed the work and that what she had learned in the process, was also relevant to supporting her children in their studies.

A mí me ha gustado. De veras me ha gustado bastante dar clases. Así le estaba yo comentando a mis compañeras, a las que llegan a estudiar, les digo yo, si a mí me hubieran enseñado todas esas técnicas antes, yo lo hubiera puesto en práctica con mis hijos. Entonces hubiera sido más fácil para ellos estudiar. Y no obligarlos a estudiar como siempre así y así es... no. Tiene que buscar uno técnicas.

Antonieta has worked out that there is more than one way of teaching, that excessive explanation is not necessarily the best way, that she doesn't have to stick to the method that has been set out, that there are a variety of strategies or techniques that can be used in the group. Taking the idea of writing short texts from one of the workshops, she put this into practice in her group. She had developed the confidence to step outside the prescribed, limited methods, to try something new. She encouraged and enabled the participants in her class to take up the challenge of expressing their thoughts in writing. She was excited by this success.

## Appendix 4: Extracts from Field Notes

### 14 March 2016: Mariana

Then Mariana starts the class and asks A to say a prayer. Then she tells them that they are going to *identificar vocales*. *Voy a explicar*, she tells them. She explains that a consonant is a non-vowel. “*Tienen que tenerlo muy claro*” she tells them and then goes on to explain about capitals and lower case.

Then she asks the two beginners to write the vowels in their names on the board and the two more advanced ones to write the consonants in their names on the board. So a jumble of single letters begins to appear on the board. Then Mariana moves on and writes the names of the participants on the board and they have to write the letters that they recognise in jumbled order underneath. It’s not something I would ever have done and it seems a bit pointless and meaningless I think but at least everyone is looking at names and recognising letters and writing them so there is some kind of visual recognition going on and there is some context with the names but not much meaning in the activity.

When they finish she elicits the vowels in order a-e-i-o-u. Then she points to the vowels on the board and names them, encouraging them to name them along with her. “*Veamos, Magdalena que letra es esa?*” she asks pointing at an a. The next name has an o and she asks which vowel it is. *Cada nombre lleva vocal* she tells them. Then more choral repetition of vowels. Then N has to do it alone which she does quietly, shyly, unsure. Magdalena is more confident.

Then she goes through the whole alphabet in order and asks if each letter is in one of the names. As this goes on the group fall into passive silence. When she gets to h, she says *hache muda*. *Del abecedario sacamos las 5 vocales*. She points out that the vowels are “repeated” in the alphabet and once implies that the alphabet is only consonants. All a bit confusing. E and A are paying attention because they know all the letters and can follow it. The other two have gone into a different space.

### Wednesday 6 April 2016: Andrea

Andrea asks them to draw something but she doesn’t say something important just whatever they want. She gives them paper and then offers them a choice of felt pen.

Elsa with a few deft strokes, confidently fills her page with a landscape with a house and when Andrea asks what word she wants, she says *paisaje*. Mari draws a small chicken in the corner of her paper. Andrea writes the words for them on whiteboards and they copy. Mari happily copies but she soon forgets what she is writing and when I ask her, she says *pollo* but in fact she had said *pollito* and that’s what she’s writing. Then the two amicably agree that the title of their poster will be *La Granja*.

They explain their picture and Elsa says that she drew the *paisaje porque es algo de la naturaleza que Dios lo hizo tan bello*. Mari says that the *pollo es lo único que tenemos en la casa*. *No tenemos otra cosa*.

Erlinda has drawn a *sol porque alumbra diario y la nube corre diario y la flores porque me gustan*. E had *maceta, porque me gustan las macetas*. The title of their poster was *El Jardín de Doña Marta* and they had done that for me. I wondered if there was a Doña Marta in the neighbourhood but it was me. I was quite touched.

The three Mam ladies did their own poster. J did a beautiful flower and I knew straight away that she did embroidery from the style of the flower. She said *la flor me*

*gusta mucho*. V. had a *gato* and also said only '*me gusta*' and the same for Valeria who had the sun. Then Andrea asked them to say what was in other people's posters but she doesn't get them to try and read.

Then she asks them if they would like to write a sentence. Mari and Elsa write *La granja de mamá*. The Mayan ladies write *Las Flores son lindas* and the two younger women wearing jeans write *El jardín de Doña Marta es bonito*.

At this point N comes in, hot and hurrying. She is coming from work she tells us. She draws a tree and a chicken and puts the title *los pollos de la casa*. I make *fichas* for all the words from the posters. I try to work with Mari with just four words: *granja*, *paisaje*, *pollo* and *pollito* but Elsa is trying to get her to sound out the letters while I'm trying to get her to compare the words and see what they have in common and which ones are shorter and longer. I would like her to be able to distinguish *pollo* from *pollito* but she doesn't get there. Andrea works at the other table with the other words but I'm not sure what she's actually doing.

Then she has their names cut into syllables. She gives each one the syllables of their name and they quickly get them in order. N rejects part of her name, trying to give it back to Andrea but eventually Andrea shows her that it is part of her name. At some point I ask Valeria to try and read something and she point blank says she can't read but she has written it.

Later when they have done their own names, they swap syllables and put together each others' names. Then they muddle up all the syllables and take their own and they all do this really well, even Valeria.

So then I suggest that they could try to write each others' names on their whiteboards and they get going. Some copy from the syllables but the strong ones work them out, so they are really concentrating and learning. When done, they copy into their notebooks. They say they are tired and it has been an effort for them, a challenge.

At the end I ask them what they have learned. E says names, J says *dibujo* so I ask her what she learned doing the *dibujo* so then she says the names of the things that they drew. *Leímos las nubes y los pollitos* says Erlinda. She has a young child strapped to her back and I play with him handing board markers back and forth. Valeria says she learned *sol* and I ask her to write it and she does it easily. Elsa says that she learned the names of all her *compañeras*.

### **18 April 2016: Alejandra**

Cecilia comes next, so I work with her. She reads her own text fluently, hesitating only at '*a pesar de*'. I correct a few spelling mistakes: *bender*, *esfuerso*, add a couple of capitals and a full stop and show her how to write the long letters. She copies her text and then we read the booklet. She tells me that she has been reading it at home, that her husband read it from beginning to end and really liked it.

A arrives and Alejandra engages her nicely, asking about her granddaughter. As Doña A has eyesight problems, Alejandra copies her text onto the mini whiteboard making it bigger and A is then able to read it. Cecilia starts work on the ceviche recipe, writing out the ingredients. A works on reading and writing her text on the whiteboard. Doña Nidia arrives and shows Alejandra the work she has been doing in her notebook: writing numbers, I think.

I work with Doña Nidia on her text. As she missed the last class, she had not written about one of the other women. Now she had to write about herself. First, we read some of the texts in the booklet. She did this with hard work and effort and she stopped after three on each page. Then she started to write her own text. She needed quite a lot of support, but I was moved by her effort, her ability and determination. Looking back just now, I see that at the last class she managed to write only three words and had mistakes in all of them. She has made solid progress.

### **Tuesday 31 May 2016: Gloria**

Gloria gets them to read our booklet. They are reading the same album pages as they were on my last visit. They are reading much better, on their own with just occasional help from Gloria. We have agreed with Gloria that she will end the class early today so that we can discuss it together. 4:30 she says. That will give us plenty of time.

At 10 to 3 A. and a woman called G. turn up together. A. says she doesn't have a copy of the booklet so I lend her mine. Gloria comes over to work with the newcomers and the other two continue reading on their own. I suggest she starts with the easiest text about likes but to start by identifying the pictures. So she does that. G. decodes syllabically while Gloria tries to get A. to follow the words on the page. When the other two hear what we are doing, they also go to that page. And in the end Gloria reads and they all read along with her.

Gloria then asks them what they like. A. says *mi grupo, bordar*. G. adds *pan*. Y. says *rosas* and Gloria says *a algunas les va a gustar todo*. Then she reads some of the sentences and asks them to identify which sentence it is on the page. But the way she asks the questions is always in this stern, demanding tone.

After the reading she brings out syllables. She gives the t family to the girls and the m family to the women. I end up working with the women. They find 5 words each beginning with one of the syllables. We get: *mamá, melón, milpa, mosca, mula*. They write them on the mini-whiteboard and read them and then write them in their notebooks. A. struggles to write an S. It comes out like a backwards 3: ε. Interesting. I try to find ways of helping her to get it right but don't succeed.

### **Thursday 9 June 2016: Yezme**

Yezme has the alphabet on the wall. She also has the names of some shops. They hadn't gone out to read signs and take photos because of the rain but they had tried to remember what shop signs there were and they had written these up on papers and put them on the wall: *carnicería, carpintería* etc.

Liliana arrives at 3:15. Yezme elicits information about the shops that they had listed last time. She asks factual questions about them like what do we go to the *carpintería* for? There is something wrong with this questioning. Obviously Liliana knows this stuff. Why is she being asked? This is not about reading and writing. Nor is it about the community. But I can't find the way in my mind to explain to her why it is wrong.

Then as they don't have any photos of street signs I ask if Liliana would like to see some that we took with another group. I have my laptop with me and show her the photos from Andrea's group. She reads all the signs and I ask them about the meaning of some of the words on the nail salon and hairdressing salon. When we finish I ask if she would like to look at another set and she says no that's enough.



### **Friday 24 June 2016: Cecilia and Dayana**

When I arrived at about 3pm the room was full. I was astonished. There were so many women and also quite a few children as usual. Wow! I was impressed. They were sitting around the two tables and everyone was getting on with something different. Some were working from their maths *cartillas*, some were reading from their notebooks, others were writing sentences based on the street signs. Everyone was pretty busy. I took photos.

Then I wandered around, listened to people reading, helped with this or that and then sat with K and helped her with some maths. The exercise that she is working on is pyramids where each brick is the sum of the two bricks it is resting on. She had already done it at home and it was completely wrong as she didn't understand what she had to do. I did a couple with her but every time I said OK, now you do the next one on your own, she showed again that she hadn't understood the concept.

When talking to Dayana on the phone, I asked if they wanted me to do something and we agreed that I would do some of the letters games. So we did, going round the class and saying the letters of the alphabet and then words beginning with those letters and it worked quite well because it brought the whole group together. I said those of you who are more advanced can do it from memory and those who are beginners can use their alphabets. So that's what they did. Some of the complete beginners struggled to even follow. There was Doña V who had had so much to say the last time I was there talking about the community. She was completely lost and the woman sitting next to her, Doña G did nothing to help her. Others did support each other and through this they were able to get what they had to do, following the alphabet and saying the letter when it was their turn. Interesting too on the words part that quite a few of the beginners were able to find other words than the one on the alphabet sheets. So they seemed to enjoy that and get involved and it felt useful.

There was a bit of time left and so we played hangman and they all enjoyed that too. I did the first word and then whoever got it came and did the next word. I took some more photos. I told them they could do those activities again, they just need to ask Dayana and Cecilia. Finally I told them how thrilled I was that there were so many of them there and that I hoped they would continue coming.

We listed the activities and then discussed what was good. Dayana mentioned that it was difficult to support everybody when so many of them came and I said that we can get into the habit of just doing individual work when there are very few but when we have so many it's important to do more whole group activities. I said that it's good for everyone to get on with individual work at the start but that once they've got the majority there, they should do a whole class activity.

We also talked about the fact that some of the participants did not support those who needed help but Dayana pointed out that others did. Then we talked about strengths and what can be improved and it was Dayana who pointed out that more groupwork was needed. She is really the reflective one.

## Appendix 5: Pilot Programme Guide for ALFs

# ALFABETIZACIÓN SIGNIFICATIVA CONTEXUALIZADA

## GUÍA DE ALFABETIZACIÓN PARA ALFABETIZADORES

### INTRODUCCIÓN

Este programa se inspira en la filosofía y metodología de Paulo Freire, siendo un proceso dialógico, participativo, analítico, crítico y creador. Además, está orientado por las ideas generadas por el movimiento de Nuevos Estudios de Lectoescritura, especialmente el trabajo de Judith Kalman sobre la importancia del contexto en la alfabetización:

*Leer y escribir son actividades comunicativas que nos ubican en el mundo social y nos vinculan continuamente con otros seres humanos. La lectura y la escritura son actividades contextualizadas: siempre ocurren en situaciones ligadas al mundo, justo porque su sentido se encuentra a partir de nuestra conexión con él. La alfabetización implica necesariamente los usos de la lectura y la escritura en contextos específicos; es la participación en eventos comunicativos donde leer y escribir son parte de la actividad comunicativa.*

Los pasos metodológicos y técnicas propuestos se basan en los principios de educación de adultos:

- Los adultos no se encuentran al inicio del proceso de aprendizaje. Ya tienen muchos conocimientos y experiencias (A. Rogers).
- Los adultos traen una riqueza de experiencias al aprendizaje y estas tienen que tomarse en cuenta cuando se planifica la educación (M. Knowles).
- Las personas aprenden mejor cuando se sienten valoradas (C. Rogers).
- El educador no puede enseñar, solo puede facilitar el aprendizaje (C. Rogers).
- El aprendizaje es cíclico, abarcando 4 fases: experiencia, reflexión, conceptualización, aplicación (D. Kolb).
- Las personas tienen diferentes estilos de aprendizaje (D. Kolb).
- Mucho de lo que aprendemos como adultos viene de participar en comunidades de práctica (J. Lave & E. Wenger).
- Los adultos aprenden lo que ellos quieren y necesitan y no van a aprender lo que no les hace falta (K. Illeris).

Se trabaja con la idea de que el conocimiento no se transmite sino se construye y para facilitarlo, hay que indagar sobre lo que las participantes en los grupos ya saben.

Se toma como base que los adultos aprenden primero y mejor lo que necesitan para su vida diaria. No les interesan mucho las explicaciones formales y teóricas. Aprenden a través de la práctica. Por lo tanto, la lectoescritura no se aprende a través de cuadros de familias silábicas o explicaciones de lo que es una oración sino aprendiendo desde el principio a escribir y leer palabras y frases que tienen significado para las personas. El proceso de alfabetización tiene que ofrecer la posibilidad de expresarse a través de

la palabra escrita, y el acceso a leer textos que forman parte de la vida de las participantes; de esta forma se desarrolla la escritura creativa y la lectura comprensiva.

Las participantes reciben un cuaderno y un lápiz, un pizarroncito (preparado emplastando papel en blanco), un marcador de pizarrón y un trapito para borrar. Los primeros intentos de escribir se facilitan escribiendo con marcador en pizarroncito. Se practica primero en pizarroncito y luego se pasa al cuaderno. Al ir ganando seguridad en formar letras, se empieza a escribir directamente en el cuaderno. Los pizarroncitos se siguen usando al escribir palabras nuevas, ensayando en el pizarroncito hasta acertar la ortografía.

La metodología abarca cinco unidades.

## **UNIDAD 1 – NUESTRO GRUPO**

En la primera unidad, las personas participantes se conocen y realizan actividades para aprender a leer y escribir sus nombres. Empiezan con el uso de pizarroncitos individuales para facilitar la formación de letras y palabras. Desarrollan la lectura leyendo lo que escriben. Mas adelante escriben oraciones sobre temas importantes para ellos.

### **Competencias:**

- Escriben y reconocen sus nombres.
- Reconocen nombres de algunos compañeros de su grupo.
- Nombran y escriben las 5 vocales y entienden su función en la formación de sílabas.
- Leen y entienden una selección de palabras que tienen importancia para ellos.
- Nombran 10 consonantes que aparecen en sus nombres y palabras significativas.
- Reconocen las familias silábicas de las 10 consonantes.
- Escriben simples oraciones con apoyo de la alfabetizadora.
- Leen simples oraciones basadas en sus propias ideas.

### **Actividades propuestas**

Cada clase debe incluir una variedad de actividades, que no necesariamente deben llevarse en el orden que se presentan en esta guía. Algunas actividades toman bastante tiempo y se extienden en dos o tres clases. Se puede retomar alguna actividad para reforzar el aprendizaje. La alfabetizadora usa su creatividad y el conocimiento de sus participantes para planear clases dinámicas y variadas que conducen al aprendizaje práctico.

#### **1. Socialización**

En parejas, las o las participantes disponen de tiempo para conversar sobre aspectos de sus vidas que les hagan sentir orgullo o contar algún logro o habilidad que tienen. Luego presentan a su pareja al grupo. Con esta actividad la alfabetizadora empieza a ver los conocimientos que existen en el grupo. Las participantes empiezan a conocerse entre todos. El propósito es romper paradigmas respecto a la idea de que una persona analfabeta es ignorante.

Hay muchas otras actividades de socialización que se pueden usar para que las participantes se conozcan y que se vaya formando un ambiente de compañerismo en el grupo. Se puede empezar cada clase de la Unidad 1 haciendo actividades de socialización. Las alfabetizadoras o alfabetizadores deben utilizar su creatividad en seleccionar o crear nuevas actividades de socialización que sean apropiadas para adultos y realizarlas con el grupo.

## 2. Gafetes

Cada participante elige el nombre por el cual quiere ser conocido en el grupo. La alfabetizadora o alfabetizador escribe el nombre de cada persona en su pizarroncito. Ellos intentan copiar sus nombres, borran sus errores hasta tener una versión aceptable y finalmente lo escriben en un gafete.

Los gafetes deben hacerse de una forma que no sea infantil. Pueden estar colocados con un gancho de ropa, crearse en un papel doblado en tres y colocarse en forma de pirámide en la mesa delante de la participante, o quedar escritos en un papel que se sujeta solo con la mano, según como se va a utilizar.



Las participantes con gafetes se organizan en círculo. Cada uno se presenta con el nombre que ha escrito en su gafete para que todos se fijen en las letras de los nombres.

Todos cuentan el número de letras que tienen sus nombres y se colocan en orden según las cantidades que identificaron. La alfabetizadora llama su atención al hecho de que cada letra en el nombre representa un sonido. Las participantes procuran reconocer los sonidos de las letras que forman sus nombres.

La alfabetizadora les pide que se fijen en una letra común que tienen las mujeres al final de su nombre. Se identifica la 'a'. Todos las participantes observan si tienen 'a' en su nombre y cuántas tienen. Se relaciona la letra con el sonido. Se hace lo mismo con otras vocales que están comunes en el grupo.

Se observa si hay alguna letra común al principio de los nombres. Se identifican las más comunes y todos miran si tienen esa letra en su nombre. Después de haber identificado las letras más comunes en el grupo, la alfabetizadora dice una de las letras y todos los que la tienen se juntan en un grupo. Cada participante nombra una letra en su nombre y todos los que la tienen se acercan a la persona que la ha llamado.

Se juntan todos los gafetes y se mezclan. Después, cada participante tiene que reconocer y encontrar su gafete. Si hay alguna participante más avanzada, se le pide que reparta los gafetes a sus dueños. Otros participantes también lo intentan. Siempre se empieza con las participantes que saben más para que los otros puedan observar hasta que se sientan con la confianza de intentarlo.

Las participantes procuran escribir su nombre en su cuaderno. Se les enseña la técnica de Mirar, Decir, Cubrir, Escribir, Chequear (MDCECh) para evitar y quitar la costumbre de las planas. Se les pide que practiquen escribiendo su nombre en casa usando esa técnica.

Los gafetes se retienen para la próxima clase. Utilizando las mismas o parecidas actividades se van introduciendo las demás vocales y otras consonantes comunes. También se puede trabajar las sílabas en los nombres, contando cuántas sílabas hay y relacionando las sílabas con las vocales. Se sigue con actividades más avanzadas

hasta que la mayoría de las participantes puedan reconocer los nombres de los compañeros y repartir los gafetes a quienes pertenezcan.

Se refuerza los nombres de las vocales, y su sonido.

### **3. Nombres cortados**

La alfabetizadora prepara el nombre de cada participante de tal manera que quede cortado en sílabas y se los entrega en desorden. Las participantes reconstruyen sus nombres con las sílabas. Una vez que lo pueden realizar procuran armar los nombres de los compañeros.

Para las personas que avanzan más rápido, se puede trabajar también los apellidos. También se puede cortar los nombres en letras y dejar que los reconstruyan.

### **4. Firmar**

Las personas del grupo que ya usan firma muestran como la escriben. La alfabetizadora también muestra su firma. Se comparten ideas de cómo se puede crear una firma única. Quienes acaban de aprender a escribir su nombre intentan diferentes maneras de firmar.

En otra clase, practican otra vez la firma y deciden cómo la van a hacer. Se hace un cartel con todas las firmas de los integrantes del grupo.

### **5. Palabras significativas.**

Cada participante piensa un rato y elige una palabra que es significativa para ella o él. Hacen un dibujo que representa la palabra. Presentan su dibujo al grupo y explican por qué esa palabra es importante para ellos. Otros participantes y la alfabetizadora hacen preguntas para desarrollar un diálogo sobre los conceptos escogidos por las participantes.

La alfabetizadora escribe la palabra significativa para cada participante en su pizarroncito. Las participantes copian, borran los errores hasta tener una versión aceptable. Luego, copian la palabra en el papel donde tienen el dibujo. Escriben su nombre en la hoja. Se hace un cartel con las hojas. Entre todos, deciden un título para el cartel. La alfabetizadora escribe el título en el pizarrón y las participantes deciden quién va a copiar el título al cartel.

Las participantes van relacionando los dibujos con las palabras. Cada participante escribe su palabra escogida en su cuaderno. Participantes más avanzados pueden escribir también alguna palabra escogida por una compañera o un compañero que les parece interesante. Se les pide que practiquen escribiendo las palabras en casa utilizando la técnica MDCECh.

Para otra clase, la alfabetizadora prepara las palabras del cartel en fichas. Fijándose en el cartel, las participantes procuran reconocer las mismas palabras en las fichas. Cada día las participantes se acercan al cartel, leen los nombres y nombran los dibujos mientras intentan leer las palabras. En varias sesiones de clase escogen, del cartel, una palabra más que les interese, la escriben en su pizarroncito y después la copian en su cuaderno. Así van acumulando una lista de palabras significativas del grupo.

Se refuerzan los nombres y sonidos de las consonantes que más se han usado hasta ahora. Las participantes cuentan las consonantes que ya reconocen.

### **6. Sopa de Letras**

La alfabetizadora elabora una sopa de letras en un cartel que incluye todas las palabras escogidas del grupo. Las participantes buscan y reconocen las palabras, pero sin marcarlas. Se deja el cartel en la pared para poder repetir la actividad o para que las participantes individualmente lo revisen.

En grupos pequeños, crean nuevas sopas de letras con palabras conocidas. Intercambian las sopas de letras con otro grupo y realizan el ejercicio de buscar y reconocer las palabras.

### **7. Terminal**

La alfabetizadora prepara sobres con algunas palabras que describen características que pueden tener las participantes. Ejemplo: bilingüe, abuela, menor de 20 años, casado, le gusta cantar, buena cocinera, carpintero etc. Reparte los sobres entre las participantes. Les dice lo que está escrito en su sobre. Las participantes escriben sus nombres en pedazos de papel. Todos se levantan y gritan lo que está escrito en su sobre como si fueran gritando el destino de una camioneta en la terminal. Las participantes se acercan y colocan su nombre en los diferentes sobres que les corresponden.

En el grupo completo se abren los sobres y se leen los nombres que contienen. Se hace una tabla con las características y los nombres como en este ejemplo.

bilingüe	abuela o abuelo	buena cocinera	cantante	casada o casado
Irma Elvira Juan Olga	Dulce Olga Oscar	María Cecilia Irma Nicolasa	Norma Irma Oscar	Nicolasa Dulce Olga Cecilia María Oscar Rigoberto

Usando la tabla la alfabetizadora hace algunas preguntas: ¿quién es abuelo? ¿María es buena cocinera? ¿Cuántas personas bilingües tenemos en el grupo? Las participantes también hacen preguntas u oraciones basadas en la tabla.

Las participantes pueden reproducir la tabla en sus cuadernos. Se retoma la tabla en clases posteriores para reforzar los nombres y las características. Las participantes más avanzadas pueden escribir oraciones acerca de sus compañeros basado en la información en la tabla.

### **8. Lectura**

La lectura está basada en lo que las participantes han escrito. Además de leer las palabras del cartel o la tabla, en cada clase se toma tiempo para que las participantes lean lo que ya tienen escrito en su cuaderno.

Esto se puede hacer al principio de cada clase ya que las participantes no suelen llegar todos a la vez. Así, la alfabetizadora tiene oportunidad de sentarse con cada participante a practicar su lectura mientras espera que llegue el grupo completo. Las participantes también pueden leer en pareja. Una lee, mientras el otro escucha y luego se cambian.

### 9. Familias silábicas

Basándose en las 10 consonantes que más han aparecido en los nombres y palabras significativas, la alfabetizadora prepara juegos de sílabas en fichas. Se presentan las familias silábicas.

En grupos, los participantes forman palabras usando las fichas de sílabas. Intentan crear nuevas palabras además de las ya conocidas. La alfabetizadora puede sugerir nuevas palabras que se pueden formar con las sílabas presentes. Escriben las nuevas palabras en sus pizarroncitos y luego en sus cuadernos.

### 10. Primeras oraciones

En el grupo completo, las participantes proponen una oración basada en alguna de las palabras significativas. La alfabetizadora asegura que la oración no sea demasiado complicada y la escribe en el pizarrón, pidiendo consejos sobre qué letras se necesitan. Luego, las participantes copian la oración en sus cuadernos, o pizarroncitos si lo prefieren.

La alfabetizadora presenta las letras aún desconocidas, buscando ejemplos entre los nombres y palabras significativas.

En parejas leen la oración y la alfabetizadora les apoya.

En grupos, procuran escribir una nueva oración basada en otra palabra significativa, en sus pizarroncitos. Cada grupo presenta su oración.

Las participantes copian oraciones escogidas por ellos en sus cuadernos. Se les pide que practiquen leyendo las oraciones en casa.

La alfabetizadora prepara una hoja con todas las oraciones creadas por las participantes, junto con los dibujos escaneados o con figuras apropiadas bajadas del internet. Se sacan suficientes copias de la hoja para cada participante. En la próxima clase se reparten las hojas, se leen las oraciones en el grupo entero y luego en parejas. Luego, cambian parejas para seguir practicando la lectura.

	Me gustan las fiestas.
Que bonito es el paisaje.	
	Que triste es que las personas talan los árboles.
Mi familia es la base de la sociedad.	
	Me gustan los pollos y correr agua.
Me gusta compartir con mi familia y me gusta trabajar.	
	Que bonita es la carretera.

Nuestras palabras	
	Me gusta el jardín porque adorna la casa. Es muy colorido.
	Mi casa es muy importante porque es el lugar donde vivo.
Las pericas me gustan porque cantan.	
	Me gustan todas las flores porque son de diferentes colores.
Me gusta ver el sol cada día al amanecer.	
Me gustan los paisajes porque es la naturaleza dibujada.	

Pegan las hojas en sus cuadernos. Se les pide que practiquen la lectura en casa.

### **11. Álbum**

Las participantes reciben copias del folleto *Mis Pensamientos Escritos*, escrito por participantes de grupos de alfabetización. Observan las hojas donde aparecen fotos de participantes con pequeños textos. La alfabetizadora explica que el grupo va a elaborar un álbum parecido a lo que se ve en el folleto.

Se fija un día para tomar fotos en los lugares elegidos por ellos y ellas. Entre todos se toman fotos de forma individual y una en grupo. La alfabetizadora se encarga de descargar las fotos e imprimir una foto de cada participante en una hoja. Debajo de la foto coloca unas líneas para escribir.

La alfabetizadora lee algunos de los textos del folleto. Las participantes procuran seguir los textos con el dedo. Una participante más avanzada puede leer alguno de los textos en voz alta. Se nota que algunos de los textos están escritos por las participantes acerca de sí mismas, mientras otros están escritos acerca de una compañera. Las participantes de grupo deciden si quieren escribir acerca de sí mismos o acerca de una compañera o un compañero.

Se comparten ideas de qué se puede escribir. Para las personas que les falta confianza se puede decidir un formato sencillo entre ellas que contiene frases como: Mi nombre es ... Tengo ... hijos. Vivo en ... Soy (oficio). Me gusta...

Las participantes escriben los textos en sus cuadernos, utilizando todo lo que han trabajado hasta ahora: cartel, hojas de oraciones, cuadro, trabajo de sílabas etc. La alfabetizadora apoya a las participantes para que utilicen lo que tienen ya en su cuaderno y en el alrededor y los anima para que se apoyen entre sí. Cada participante lee su texto escrito. Se corrigen errores. Luego, copian sus textos en las hojas con las fotos.

Se exponen las hojas en la pared. Las participantes se acercan a la exposición y procuran leer algún texto que no es suyo. Se apoyan entre sí. Deciden si quieren dejar las hojas en la pared, llevarlas a su casa o pegarlas en el cuaderno.

La alfabetizadora prepara una hoja de lectura con las fotos y los textos corregidos y las distribuye en la próxima clase. Se lee la hoja en grupo entero y luego en parejas. Luego, cambian parejas para seguir practicando la lectura. Pegan las hojas en sus cuadernos. Se les pide que practiquen la lectura en casa.

### **12. Repaso y evaluación de la unidad**

Entre todas las participantes recuerdan las actividades que realizaron a lo largo de la unidad. Se comparten ideas sobre cuáles actividades gustaron más y por qué, y cuáles gustaron menos. La alfabetizadora hace preguntas para profundizar el intercambio. Apunta algunas de las respuestas para ayudarlo en su planificación de la segunda unidad.

La alfabetizadora lee la lista de competencias de la primera unidad y pregunta quién ha ganado cada una de esas competencias. Las participantes se autoevalúan en las competencias con apoyo mutuo. La alfabetizadora completa su registro de aprendizaje para la unidad, basado en la autoevaluación de las participantes y su propia observación de su progreso.



## UNIDAD 2 – NUESTRAS FAMILIAS

En la segunda unidad las participantes aprenden a escribir los nombres de los miembros de su familia. Traen textos escritos que se encuentran en su casa y los comparten y analizan en el grupo, para comenzar a entender los contenidos. Escriben textos sencillos acerca de sus familias.

### Competencias:

- Escriben y reconocen los nombres de sus hijos
- Reconocen el sonido de la mayoría de las letras del abecedario
- Empiezan a usar los nombres de las letras
- Deletrean nombres conocidos
- Manejan el silabario completo
- Entienden el contenido del DPI
- Empiezan a familiarizarse con algunas palabras en documentos formales
- Escriben un pequeño texto personal con apoyo de la alfabetizadora
- Leen textos simples con temas conocidos

### Actividades propuestas:

#### 1. Presentación

Cada participante hace un dibujo mostrando los miembros de su familia. Presenta el dibujo al grupo y explica quiénes son las personas. Se mira las diferentes interpretaciones de lo que es la familia y las diferentes formas de familia que surgen en las presentaciones.

Las participantes eligen 5 palabras claves, que surgen de las presentaciones, para escribirlas: ej. hijos, abuela, esposo etc. El alfabetizador escribe las palabras escogidas en el pizarrón y todos las copian en su cuaderno. Se pone atención en letras todavía no conocidas (no más de 5). Se presentan las familias silábicas de las letras. Las participantes leen las palabras en parejas, hasta que las saben todas. Se les pide que practiquen leyendo las palabras en casa.

#### 2. Abecedario y cartel significativo

La alfabetizadora prepara un cartel del abecedario con letras mayúsculas y minúsculas. Se expone el cartel en la pared.

Observando el cartel, las participantes eligen 5 letras que conocen mejor y entre todas proponen y deciden una palabra significativa que empiece con cada una de las letras. Para ayudarles a buscar palabras, se puede buscar usando la familia silábica, o sea, palabras que empiecen con ma, me, mi, mo, mu en el caso de la m.



Cada participante elige una de las letras y hace un dibujo que representa la palabra que se acordó en grupo completo. Después, todas las participantes escriben las palabras en el pizarroncito, luego en el cuaderno. Al final escriben la palabra de su

figura en un papel y lo pegan en el cartel. El grupo completo se acerca al cartel y leen las palabras.

En la próxima clase se leen otra vez las palabras en el cartel y se eligen unas cuantas letras más. El número de letras que se seleccionan dependerá de la asistencia de participantes y en el nivel que llevan de aprendizaje. En cada clase se refuerza lo que ya se vio y se introducen nuevas letras en el cartel. De esa manera se va completando el abecedario. Se procura ver todas las letras entre 5 clases o 15 días. El cartel queda pegado en el salón de sesiones y sirve como una herramienta para ir reforzando el



conocimiento de las letras. También se debe usar como referencia cuando se busca una letra o un sonido en actividades de escritura.

Una vez completado el cartel, la alfabetizadora lo reproduce en

computadora, con las palabras escogidas por las participantes usando figuras del internet. Se reduce a 2 o 3 hojas. Se hace una copia para cada participante. Las participantes pegan el abecedario en sus cuadernos. Se les pide que estudien el abecedario en sus casas.

Aa		árbol	Li		limon
Bb		banano	Li II		llave
Cc		casa	Mm		manzana
Dd		dedo	Nn		Nubes
Ee		estrella	Ññ		Ñño
Ff		flor	Oo		ojo

### **3. Nombres de Familiares**

La alfabetizadora pregunta los nombres de los hijos de sus participantes y escribe los más comunes en el pizarrón. Solicita que quienes tienen hijas o hijos con esos nombres los copien en sus cuadernos. Luego, la alfabetizadora escribe los nombres de los hijos de cada participante en fichas. Las participantes manejan las fichas y leen los nombres. Se cortan los nombres en sílabas y las participantes reconstruyen los nombres cortados.

Cada participante procura escribir los nombres de todos sus hijos. El alfabetizador apoya y corrige. Practican escribir los nombres de sus hijos en su cuaderno usando la técnica de MDCECh.

#### **4. DPI**

Las participantes traen sus DPI al grupo. Se mira y analiza toda la información en el DPI. La alfabetizadora contesta preguntas que tengan sobre el contenido del DPI. Explica el significado del número de DPI. Todos comparan sus DPI para ver si están todos registrados en el mismo lugar.

La Alfabetizadora escribe su nombre completo en el pizarrón y pide a las participantes que lo vayan deletreando. Se corrige y repite. La Alfabetizadora escribe los nombres de las participantes más avanzadas en el pizarrón y ellos deletrean sus nombres delante de todo el grupo. En parejas, deletrean sus nombres completos como aparecen en el DPI, usando el abecedario como apoyo.

#### **5. Fechas**

Se estudia la forma de escribir la fecha en el DPI. Se descubre el nombre completo del mes de forma corta. Se lee las fechas usando los nombres completos de los meses.

Las participantes escriben su fecha de nacimiento en los cuadernos. Pueden escribir el nombre corto o completo del mes, según su nivel y preferencia.

Se nombran los meses por número. La alfabetizadora escribe el nombre de los meses y sus números en el pizarrón.

El grupo completo piensa en eventos culturales o religiosos que se celebran en cada mes del año. Se hace un cartel con los nombres de los meses y el festival o evento que le corresponde.

Copian el cuadro en sus cuadernos y lo leen. Practican la lectura también en casa.

Al principio de cada clase se recuerda la fecha, uno de las participantes la escribe en el pizarrón y todos

la escriben en sus cuadernos. Se propone un método para escribir la fecha usando solo números (con raya, o diagonal).

Enero 6	Día de los Reyes Magos
Febrero 14	Día del Cariño
Marzo 8	Día Internacional de la Mujer
Abril	Semana Santa
Mayo 10	Día de la Madre
Junio 17	Día del Padre
Julio 23	Día de los Abuelos
Agosto 15	Día de La Virgen de La Asunción
Septiembre 15	Día de la Independencia
Octubre 1	Día del Niño
Noviembre 1	Día de los Santos
Diciembre 25	Navidad

Las participantes hacen un cuadro con los nombres de sus hijos y sus fechas de nacimiento en sus cuadernos, con apoyo de la alfabetizadora.

#### **6. Papeles familiares**

Cada participante lleva a la clase cualquier tipo de papel relacionado con su familia, que quieren poder leer. Puede ser: acta matrimonial, tarjeta de calificación de sus niños, recibo de luz, tarjetas de cuentas de ahorro etc. El grupo mira los diferentes

documentos. La alfabetizadora elige palabras y frases claves, las escribe en el pizarrón. Todos leen del pizarrón, luego copian al cuaderno y leen en pareja.

La alfabetizadora escribe las palabras claves en fichas. Las participantes usan las fichas para practicar la lectura de las palabras. Se vuelve a mirar los documentos y se reconocen las palabras claves. Se pueden ir agregando más palabras de los documentos en otra clase.

### **7. Silabario completo**

La alfabetizadora prepara silabarios completos y los lleva al grupo. Se hace varias actividades con los silabarios. Ejemplos:

- En grupos forman todas las palabras nuevas que puedan y después las comparten
- Forman las palabras que diga el alfabetizador
- Se forma palabras escogidas por cada participante
- En parejas, una persona forma alguna palabra y la otra la lee

### **8. Lectura**

Se sigue practicando la lectura en cada clase. Las participantes leen todo lo que tienen escrito en su cuaderno. Es bueno empezar cada clase con lectura. Al inicio, cada participante se pone a leer solo o busca una pareja. La alfabetizadora trabaja con los que más apoyo necesitan.

Todas las participantes reciben una copia del librito de lectura elaborado con textos escritos por participantes en grupos de alfabetización de años anteriores. Leen y comprenden algunos textos en grupo entero y los comentan. Leen los mismos textos en pareja. La alfabetizadora verifica la comprensión de la lectura a través de preguntas del contenido en forma verbal.

Las participantes se llevan los libritos a casa y siguen leyendo. Se usa el librito para animar a las participantes para escribir sus propios textos.

### **9. Texto sobre la familia**

Se propone que cada participante escriba un pequeño texto acerca de su familia. Se comparte ideas sobre qué se puede incluir en el texto. Se reflexiona sobre la importancia de la familia.

Las participantes empiezan a escribir sus textos. La alfabetizadora los apoya y corrige. Leen sus textos en pareja. Después, leen sus textos para todo el grupo. Los compañeros hacen preguntas y pueden sugerir formas de mejorar los textos.

Revisan sus textos con el apoyo de la alfabetizadora. Escriben los textos corregidos de nuevo. Leen sus textos otra vez en pareja.

Si el grupo desea puede hacer un cartel con sus textos y los dibujos de sus familias.





La alfabetizadora recoge los textos y produce una(s) hoja(s) con todos ellos. Los reparte en la próxima clase. Se lee la hoja en el grupo completo y después en parejas. Las participantes pegan la hoja en sus cuadernos y practican la lectura en casa.

### 10. Repaso y evaluación de la unidad

Se lleva el repaso y evaluación de la segunda unidad de la misma manera que se hizo al final de la primera unidad.

## UNIDAD 3 – NUESTRA COMUNIDAD

En esta unidad, participantes salen como grupo para observar su comunidad. Dibujan un mapa. Deciden entre ellos que temas de la comunidad quieren tratar. Hacen una investigación sobre los temas escogidos y escriben simples informes.

### Competencias:

- Leen una variedad de palabras y textos que se encuentran en su comunidad
- Entienden las representaciones que se usan en los mapas
- Dibujan un mapa de un lugar conocido o de su comunidad
- Investigan un tema de interés
- Preparan una presentación basada en su investigación
- Escriben, con apoyo, un texto basado en su investigación
- Empiezan a revisar textos escritos con apoyo

### Actividades propuestas:

#### 1. Rótulos

El grupo sale y mira los diferentes rótulos y textos escritos que aparecen en el vecindario. Apoyándose entre ellos, leen los rótulos. Deciden si son palabras o textos que les resultan importantes. La alfabetizadora toma fotos de los rótulos y los imprime en papel fuerte para hacer fichas. Se trabaja las fichas, sobre todo con las participantes que necesitan más apoyo.





## 2. Mapa

La alfabetizadora trae mapas de la zona al grupo. Las participantes buscan lugares conocidos en el mapa. Leen los nombres. Se les pide que sigan leyendo lo que puedan en los mapas en sus casas.



En grupos pequeños, las participantes procuran dibujar un simple mapa de la comunidad escribiendo los nombres de lugares. Con sus mapas en mano el grupo entero sale y pasea por la comunidad, controlando si los mapas representan la realidad. Con el apoyo de la alfabetizadora, anotan los errores.

De regreso al salón, en sus grupos hacen una nueva versión de sus mapas. Cada grupo presenta su mapa al grupo entero. Se compara los mapas y se hace nota de errores. Basándose en los mapas de los grupos, en el grupo completo se hace un mapa grande de la comunidad en un cartel.

## 3. Temas comunitarios

El grupo comparte ideas sobre temas de la comunidad que les gustaría tratar. Según el tamaño del grupo, se escoge 1 o 2 temas. Algunos ejemplos:

- ¿Por qué algunos adultos en la comunidad no quieren estudiar?
- Cuestiones de salud en la comunidad
- Historia de la comunidad y cambios vistos

La alfabetizadora invita a personas expertas en los temas escogidos para venir a dar una charla. Las participantes preparan preguntas para las personas que vienen a dar las charlas.

Las participantes se forman en grupos según el tema que más les interesa y buscan más información sobre el mismo. Entrevistan a personas que tienen conocimiento sobre el tema. Toman fotos o hacen dibujos relacionados con el tema. La alfabetizadora apoya a los grupos en el proceso de investigación.

Los grupos reúnen toda la información recogida. Hacen un cartel con las fotos y dibujos, palabras y frases claves. Los grupos presentan su cartel y la información recogida al grupo entero. Se hacen preguntas y comentarios. Se evalúa las presentaciones, entre todos.



## 4. Textos informativos

Cada grupo escribe un texto basado en la información recogida, con apoyo de la alfabetizadora. La alfabetizadora imprime los textos en una hoja, la reproduce y la

reparte en el grupo. Se lee los textos y se comenta. Los grupos hacen cambios en sus textos para mejorarlos. La alfabetizadora imprime la hoja con los textos editados y la reparte otra vez. Se lee la versión final en el grupo y se comenta. Las participantes pegan la hoja en sus cuadernos.

### ***5. Repaso y evaluación de la unidad***

Se lleva el repaso y evaluación de la tercera unidad de la misma manera que se hizo con las unidades 1 y 2.

## **UNIDAD 4 – Nuestro Tema Elegido**

El grupo entero decide que tema quieren trabajar en la última unidad. Algunos ejemplos:

- Derechos de la mujer
- Remedios naturales
- Tradiciones culturales

Se construyen nuevos conocimientos basados en las experiencias y competencias ganadas en la Unidad 3. Se proponen algunas actividades pero el grupo decide cuáles desea realizar o adaptar a su propio contexto.

### **Competencias:**

Las participantes desarrollarán las siguientes competencias:

- Planifican un proyecto de investigación
- Leen textos sencillos sobre temas que les interesan
- Investigan un tema de interés
- Escriben, con poco apoyo, textos expresando sus ideas
- Revisan textos escritos, con apoyo de la alfabetizadora
- Planifican y crean un folleto basado en su proyecto

### **Actividades propuestas:**

#### ***1. Presentación del tema***

Entre todos se decide el tema que se quiere trabajar. Una vez decidido el tema, las participantes comparten sus conocimientos y opiniones sobre el mismo. Se decide qué conocimiento adicional se quiere adquirir sobre el tema y dónde se puede buscar información.

#### ***2. Fichas de palabras***

Se crean fichas con palabras claves que surgen del tema. Se practica la lectura de las palabras para llegar a reconocerlas a simple vista.

#### ***3. Cartel***

Las participantes crean un cartel que representa sus ideas sobre el tema, usando su propia creatividad.

#### ***4. Charla***

Se invita a una persona que tiene conocimientos sobre el tema a dar una charla. Antes de la charla se piensa en posibles preguntas para el expositor y así ampliar conocimientos sobre el tema. Cada participante prepara y escribe una pregunta para el expositor. Al escuchar la charla, la alfabetizadora apunta las ideas claves. Las participantes hacen sus preguntas y la alfabetizadora toma nota de las respuestas, de manera resumida.

### **5. Debate**

Después de la charla, el grupo comparte lo que entendió y los nuevos conocimientos o ideas que adquirieron. Se organiza un debate en clase para ampliar las ideas y analizar más profundamente el tema.

### **6. Escritura de textos**

Las participantes, individualmente o en pareja, escriben un texto sobre el tema basándose en las ideas que salieron en el debate. Cada participante lee su texto para el grupo completo y se hace más preguntas y comentarios.

### **7. Salida**

Se planifica una salida a un lugar relacionado con el contenido temático. El grupo piensa qué nuevo aprendizaje quieren alcanzar en esta salida. Puede ser una actividad de observación o entrevistas. Se planifican metas para la salida. Se realiza la salida en un día que conviene a todo el grupo.

En la próxima clase se intercambian los conocimientos adquiridos en la salida. Cada participante escribe un texto según sus capacidades sobre la salida. Luego, se juntan en parejas y leen el texto que escribió la otra persona. Hacen alguna pregunta o algún comentario sobre el texto de la pareja. Después cada participante lee su texto para el grupo completo y se hace más preguntas y comentarios.

### **8. Elaboración de folleto**

El grupo repasa todo lo que se ha escrito sobre el tema y se inicia el proyecto de elaboración de un folleto.

Se preparan los textos revisados para el folleto. Se busca o se dibuja las imágenes necesarias. La alfabetizadora prepara una primera versión del folleto con los textos e imágenes. El grupo lo comenta y decide si hace falta hacer algunos cambios. El grupo decide cómo quieren hacer la portada.

La alfabetizadora finaliza el diseño del folleto con el apoyo de otros compañeros o su CMA. Se produce copias del folleto para todos las participantes y algunos más para personas de la comunidad interesada. Se hace una presentación del folleto en la comunidad

### **9. Repaso y evaluación de la unidad**

Se lleva el repaso y evaluación de la cuarta unidad de la misma manera que se hizo con las unidades 1, 2 y 3.

## **UNIDAD 5 – REFORZAMIENTO Y EVALUACION**

En esta unidad se refuerza todo lo aprendido usando actividades de escritura creativa y lectura comprensiva.

### **Competencias:**

- Desarrollan escritura creativa con un estilo propio
- Leen textos diversos comprendiendo el significado



## **Actividades propuestas:**

### ***1. Lectura***

Las participantes leen todos los textos escritos y pegados en sus cuadernos. Cada participante escoge un texto que le llama la atención y lo lee en voz alta al grupo, explicando porque le gusta. El grupo comparte ideas sobre los textos.

### ***2. Elaboración de textos***

El grupo revisa los temas trabajados. Cada participante decide sobre qué tema quiere escribir un texto nuevo.

Cada participante escribe por lo menos un texto para incluir en un librete de lectura que se elabora entre todos los grupos del proceso y en un folleto para el grupo mismo. Se leen los textos en el grupo y se comentan. La alfabetizadora corrige errores de ortografía y gramática. Las participantes revisan sus textos y escriben la versión final.

Se reúne los textos y la alfabetizadora los prepara en computadora y los imprime. Se revisan los textos en el grupo entero y se decide el orden en que van a aparecer en el folleto y las imágenes que se quiere usar.

La alfabetizadora prepara el folleto según las decisiones tomadas en el grupo. Se imprime copias del folleto suficientes para el grupo y para compartir con otro grupo.

### ***3. Intercambio de folletos entre grupos de alfabetización.***

Se organiza reuniones para intercambiar folletos. Puede ser dos grupos cercanos que se reúnen o una reunión de todos los grupos. Cada grupo presenta su trabajo a los otros grupos

### ***4. Comprensión de lectura.***

En sus propios grupos, participantes leen los folletos de otro grupo y lo comentan. Se organiza cambios de folletos con otros grupos y se sigue leyendo y comentando la variedad de textos. Entre todos escogen los textos que mas les gustan y explican porque.

### ***5. Evaluación final***

CMA prepara una evaluación final basada en las unidades trabajadas.

Participantes hacen la evaluación final preparada para el piloto. También hacen la evaluación final tradicional de CONALFA.

### ***6. Preparación del folleto del proceso***

Las alfabetizadoras y la CMA se reúnen para revisar los folletos elaborados por los grupos y seleccionan los textos que se van a incluir en el librete de lectura del proceso, basándose en las opiniones expresadas por las participantes y sus propias opiniones.

Se reparte las responsabilidades de completar el trabajo de elaborar el librete: organizar capítulos, escribir introducciones, preparar el librete para impresión, etc.

Se imprime el librete y se presenta a todas las participantes en la clausura del programa.

## Appendix 6: Summary of Training and Development Workshops

No	Core Aims	Key Activities
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First steps in formation of a Community of Learning.</li> <li>• Introduction to the approach of the pilot programme.</li> <li>• Modelling of the first activities of the first unit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction of a mind-map of qualities for being an ALF</li> <li>• Using Arabic script to experience the learning of writing your name for the first time</li> <li>• ALFs lead a pilot activity from reading instructions.</li> </ul>
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modelling and practice of Unit 1 activities</li> <li>• Building confidence in leading name-related activities</li> <li>• Analysing the double learning of the workshop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion of learning cycle</li> <li>• ALFs practise activities to use with work on names</li> <li>• ALFs lead the significant words activity following instructions and using Arabic script</li> </ul>
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to learn from each other's experiences</li> <li>• Building confidence in leading further Unit 1 activities</li> <li>• Introduction to systematization of experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ALFs share experiences of leading activities in their groups</li> <li>• ALFs analyse their reading strategies for Arabic script</li> <li>• ALFs practice further activities following written instructions</li> </ul>
4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of learning during Unit 1</li> <li>• Introduction to learning styles and strategies</li> <li>• Agreeing good practice in literacy education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ALFs exchange experiences and reflect on work done in Unit 1</li> <li>• Introduction of Kolb's learning styles</li> <li>• Whole team agrees criteria for good practice</li> </ul>
5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding that literacy is a social and cultural practice</li> <li>• Developing strategies for using groupwork</li> <li>• Preparation for Unit 2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion of literacy practices based on ALFs' own records of reading and writing during previous week</li> <li>• Participation in discussion on leadership and reflection on what makes a good discussion</li> <li>• ALFs propose and develop ideas on various forms of groupwork in their classes</li> </ul>
6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of Unit 1</li> <li>• Reflection on participant learning</li> <li>• Review of learning on the programme to date</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ALFs evaluate their work on Unit 1</li> <li>• ALFs present reading materials they have produced with their groups and discuss reading strategies</li> <li>• Collective evaluation of the unit and proposals for improvement in the guide</li> </ul>
7.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing of ideas on formative assessment</li> <li>• Reflection on ALFs' development</li> <li>• Analysis of the pedagogical value of different activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion on ALFs' written reflections on Unit 1</li> <li>• Creation of whole group mind map of ALF learning</li> <li>• Development of activities to assess participant learning</li> </ul>

8.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of Unit 2</li> <li>• Preparation for Unit 3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ALFs share their written reflections on Unit 2</li> <li>• ALFs go out to take photos of street texts and discuss how to do this with their groups</li> <li>• ALFs draw maps of their communities and discuss different approaches</li> </ul>
9.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of what we have learned about literacy learning</li> <li>• Revision of basic concepts of the pilot approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ALFs return to Arabic script learning from initial workshops and review what and how they remember</li> <li>• Introduction, practice and evaluation of word games for use in groups</li> <li>• Practice in writing following a discussion, sharing and improving writing and discussing how to use this in literacy groups</li> </ul>
10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation for Systematization of Experiences</li> <li>• Sharing and development of ideas for Unit 4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ALFs share their participant case study</li> <li>• Preparation for an evaluation discussion with group participants</li> <li>• ALFs share ideas for Unit 4 topics and work in small groups to develop appropriate activities</li> </ul>

## **Appendix 7: Advice for ALFs (Ministry of Education, Quito)**

### CONSEJOS A ALFABETIZADORAS/ES

Quienes asumimos la función de educar, muchas veces adoptamos una actitud autoritaria frente a nuestros educandos. Esto se debe a que el educador está convencido de que él es el único que sabe, que su conocimiento es infalible y que por tanto, su papel es transmitir ese conocimiento.

De esta manera, el educador muchas veces confunde autoridad con autoritarismo. Organiza, propone, ordena, impone, desconociendo y hasta irrespetando las opiniones y los modos de vida del grupo.

- Ni el alfabetizador es un sabio, ni el alfabetizando es un ignorante
- La educación debe partir de la realidad y de los conocimientos de los educandos
- Enseñar no es solo transmitir conocimientos, sino sobre todo desafiar la inteligencia y capacidad de los educandos para que ellos mismos se involucren en un proceso de descubrimiento y construcción del conocimiento
- El buen educador es el que, a la vez que educa, está dispuesto a educarse y a ser educado.

Lo que no hay que hacer en el proceso de alfabetización:

- No imponer nuestra manera de pensar y actuar al grupo
- No tratar a los alfabetizandos como si fueran niños
- No concentrar todas las decisiones en el manejo de la clase
- No monopolizar el uso de la palabra
- No monopolizar la información sobre el proceso de enseñanza
- No olvidar que los alfabetizandos deben aprender por su propio esfuerzo
- No adoptar una actitud permanente de corrector
- No fomentar el individualismo y la competencia
- No forzar el ritmo de la enseñanza
- No exagerar la importancia de los ejercicios de preescritura
- No enseñar a leer los nombres o los sonidos de las letras
- No enseñar las sílabas en un orden fijo
- No realizar una lectura silábica
- No mandar tareas a la casa

(Ministerio de Educación, Quito)

## Appendix 8: Evaluation Checklist

AUTO-EVALUACION	
<b>Preparación</b>	
Buscar siempre un contexto para el aprendizaje de la lecto-escritura	No enseñar a leer los nombres o los sonidos de las letras
Relacionar las experiencias en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje	No monopolizar la información sobre el proceso de enseñanza
Asegurarse que toda lectura y escritura sea significativa para las/los participantes	No exagerar la importancia de los ejercicios de preescritura
Planificar una variedad de actividades para cada clase	
<b>Trabajo en Equipo</b>	
Tratar a las/los participantes como compañeras/os	No tratar a los alfabetizandos como si fueran niños
Fomentar un ambiente de compañerismo y ayuda mutua	No fomentar el individualismo y la competencia
Dejar que las/los participantes apoyen a las/los compañeras/os	
<b>Expresión</b>	
Animar a las/los participantes para que expresen sus conocimientos	
Dejar que las/los participantes expresen sus ideas	No imponer nuestra manera de pensar y actuar al grupo
Respetar las opiniones de las/los participantes	No monopolizar el uso de la palabra
Pedir comentarios a las/los participantes sobre las clases	No concentrar todas las decisiones en el manejo de la clase
<b>Auto Aprendizaje</b>	
Motivar a las/los participantes a que puedan aprender por su propio esfuerzo	No olvidar que los alfabetizandos deben aprender por su propio esfuerzo
Permitir a las/los participantes aprender usando sus propias estrategias	
<b>Estrategias de enseñanza-aprendizaje</b>	
Tomar en cuenta que las/los participantes aprenden de formas diversas	
Ser paciente y activa con las/los participantes	
Velar que cada participante esté trabajando al nivel apropiado para ella.	No forzar el ritmo de la enseñanza
Reconocer el trabajo bien hecho. Corregir solo lo necesario.	No adoptar una actitud permanente de corrector

### Appendix 9: Records of Visits to Groups

Name of ALF	Dates of Visits							
Dayana & Gabriela	7 March	11 April	25 April	11 May	3 June	24 June	6 July	27 July
Gloria	8 March	12 April	26 April	31 May	21 June	5 July		
Mariana	14 March	8 April	29 April	23 May	10 June	27 June	13 July	
Alexandra	16 March	18 April	2 May	16 May	6 June	22 June	4 July	
Yezme	4 April	19 April	17 May	30 May	9 June	14 July		
Andrea	6 April	20 April	4 May	25 May	8 June	20 June	11 July	20 July
Miriam	13 April	27 April	5 May					
Sylvia	9 May	18 May	27 May	15 June	1 July	8 July		

## **Appendix 10: Selections from ALFs' Written Assignments**

### **Reflections on Unit 1 – Yezme**

Adecuar una metodología completamente distinta a la que se está acostumbrado es difícil porque cada vez que intento aplicarla, no puedo por completo ya que hay parámetros que establece cierta metodología, que la otra no hace caso de ello. Pero sé que un cambio es muy importante, salir de lo mismo del acomodamiento al que estamos acostumbrados. Es el primer paso para el cambio que se fortalece y crezca y el país avance. Yo si comparto y aplaudo mucho cuando se dice que el conocimiento no se transmite, se construye.

Lo más interesante es porque lo que aprenden se relaciona con su vida diaria, inducirlos a que desafíen su inteligencia y la capacidad que estos poseen. Es muy interesante ya que el desafío es para nosotras también. Pues que mejor maestro que la vida, pues esta nos ha enseñado y llenado de conocimientos y experiencias. Pues hay cosas que saben y otras no, como la de no saber plasmar por escrito sus propios conocimientos. Pues al hablar de esto, creo que definitivamente, el avance que la metodología produce en los alfabetizandos es muy interesante.

Entender que no todos aprenden de la misma manera es importante. Es casi imposible afirmar que todas las personas aprenden de una misma manera. Sin embargo, buscar otras formas de ayudarlas a plasmar lo que ya conocen es importante. Hay veces que como alfabetizadora me decepciona y es que no siempre llegan todas. Eso hace que me estanque y evita por un lado que todas vayamos al mismo ritmo. También me sorprende la vida y la realidad que cada persona ha vivido; y con las personas que la vida se ha enseñado mucho. Estas son un tipo de personas muy fuertes que buscan la manera de salir siempre adelante y me encanta como se entusiasman al ir y aprender. El convivio que entre ellas se mantiene es muy lindo y sobre todo que comparten sus conocimientos entre ellas mismas. Lo interesante está en el ánimo y apoyo que una influye sobre otra. Es una como tipo de satisfacción ese apoyo mutuo. Pero sobre todo a esforzarme más con el fin de poder aplicar...

### **Reflections on Unit 1 – Andrea**

La técnica del aprendizaje de la primera unidad estuvo muy bien, les gustó mucho porque primero empezaron con su nombre que es lo más importante y a través de eso ellos pudieron escribir oraciones. La técnica del álbum estuvo muy bien porque ellas a través de la foto se motivaron. Yo creo que se sigue así con esa técnica pero con dibujo y letra porque a ellas se les hace mejor la comprensión de lectura o también con las palabras cortadas. Esa técnica estuvo muy bien porque ellas se ponían a analizar que letra va primero para formar una oración. Ellas ponían agilizar su mente, así como la actividad de la sopa de letras que les gustó mucho.

### **Reflection on Unit 2 – Dayana**

Cuando empezamos con la Unidad 2, 'Mi familia' MJA se emocionó bastante. Al principio dijo: yo no puedo dibujar pero cuando empezó a dibujar y terminó de dibujar a ella le gustó bastante su dibujo y empezó a escribirles los nombres de su familia. A ella le gusta trabajar con el silabario, formando palabras y conocer otras palabras nuevas y forma su propio texto de lectura sobre la familia. Lo que he observado de las estrategias de aprendizaje es que a ella le gusta la lectura individual y que uno esté con ella para escucharle. Le gusta resumir lo que entendió de la lectura. Realizamos fichas cortadas para ayudarles en sus lecturas.

¿Qué he aprendido sobre las experiencias de trabajo de la Unidad 2? Que a través de la unidad, cada participante pudo plasmar sus pensamientos y características sobre su

familia. Observé como ellas han avanzado y conocen mucho más. Los carteles de abecedario son de mucha ayuda para ellas.

### **Reflection on Unit 2 – Mariana**

En esta segunda unidad, he visto el avance de cada participante. Doña A. tiene el gran deseo de aprender bien a leer pero dice que solo le falta un poco más de esfuerzo para poder aprender más. Doña B. está muy contenta porque dice que es capaz de reconocer todas las letras y sonidos del abecedario y los nombres de sus hijos. Dice que eso es un gran motivo para seguir adelante.

Todas las participantes se han motivado con las actividades que se están realizando porque les es de mucha importancia conocer los nombres de sus familiares, los documentos que no habían reconocido y que es lo que dice. Todas las actividades son de mucha importancia ya que con ello se nos ha ayudado a descubrir nuevas cosas y has sido de mucha ayuda y como desenvolvemos cada día.

### **Case Study of a Participant – Gloria**

Rosa María es de origen guatemalteca. Es una mujer maya K'iche. Habla idioma español como también un poco del idioma K'iche. Ella tiene 27 años, tiene 4 hijos y lastimosamente su historia es muy triste ya que el padre de sus hijos, por la necesidad, viajó a Estados Unidos de mojado pero desapareció y ahora ya no saben nada de él. No saben si aún vive o ya no, ya que tiene aproximadamente un año desaparecido. Rosa María ahora vive con su madre porque no tiene a donde ir.

Aun cuando era niña no tuvo la oportunidad de estudiar ya que sus padres no se lo dieron. Sus padres pensaban que ella no era varón para que vaya a la escuela. Rosa María es muy estudiosa a pesar de que tiene muchas obligaciones por cuidar a sus hijos. Hace el esfuerzo para repasar en su casa. De todas las competencias llevadas a cabo en todo este proceso, siendo una participante principiante logra escribir y reconocer su nombre y el nombre de casi todas sus compañeras. Ya sabe y conoce las 5 vocales. De las 8 competencias de la primera unidad, aunque las últimas tres competencias se le hicieron muy difíciles, no porque no puede o no sabe sino por cuestión de inasistencia.

Rosa María aprende más cuando todo lo que vemos lo escribe en su cuaderno y luego lo lee varias veces. La actividad que más le gusta es cuando utilizamos fichas y cuando leemos, aunque a ella le gusta más individualmente. Rosa María aprende mejor cuando lo que vemos de un tema vaya representado de un dibujo ya que solo así no se le olvida tan rápido sobre que estamos leyendo o escribiendo. Y más cuando vimos el tema de la segunda unidad que fue la familia. Rosa María no logró conocer todas las competencias de la segunda unidad pero la que más aprendió fue el nombre de sus hijos y un apellido de ellos y lo que más me llenó de satisfacción es que se lo aprendió muy rápido que hasta la de sus otros familiares logró escribirles el nombre. Aunque al escribir pequeños textos le es muy dificultoso. Ahora en la tercera unidad no asiste frecuentemente a clases por cuestión tiempo y las competencias que si ha ganado es que las palabras que se encuentran en su comunidad. Entiende las convenciones de mapas y logra dibujar su mapa.

Rosa María dice que se siente feliz de ir a la escuela: "primero Dios, voy a aprender más porque tengo hijos y porque la escuela es muy importante. Voy a venir más a mis clases y voy a repasar en mi casa más. Porque el bien es para mí y si no lo aprovecho me voy a arrepentir. Más adelante y más si usted se va, nadie nos va a enseñar a leer y a escribir. Y le agradezco mucho porque nos tiene paciencia. Dios se lo pagará"



### **Final Reflection – Alejandra**

En estos 8 meses de proceso para nosotras las alfabetizadoras, en mi pensar, siento que fue muy enriquecedor en todos los aspectos, tanto amistoso, como en el estudio. He aprendido que no siempre se harán las cosas de la misma manera y para eso tenemos que tener una mente abierta a los cambios que hay para enseñar. Porque no todos aprendemos de una misma forma y esto despierta nuestra área investigativa y analítica en la que observamos, comparamos y reflexionamos como cada persona aprende. Fue algo que nunca imaginé llegar a aprender y lo que me gusta es que en este método significativo, contextual aplicado a la enseñanza, antes de llevarlo con las participantes, lo practicábamos entre las compañeras del grupo, claro no todas lo hacíamos de una misma manera pero fue interesante como cada una lo interpretaba de una forma distinta. He llegado a la conclusión que en cualquier área de nuestra vida podemos aplicar lo significativo-contextual, tanto en lo personal, familiar y en el trabajo a desempeñar. Es motivador saber cómo las personas podemos aprender unas a otras y saber agarrar lo mejor de cada uno y a aplicarlo a la enseñanza.

### **Final Reflection – Gabriela**

Al iniciar veía todo de otra forma. Pensé que ayudar a personas ya mayores a leer y escribir iba a ser algo muy sencillo. (siguiendo la forma tradicional) como a mí me enseñaron en la escuela. Pero algo que no tomé en cuenta en ese momento fue que la manera de aprender de un niño no lo es como el de un adulto. Ya traía conocimientos pedagógicos por ser maestra de preprimaria pero al introducirme más al proyecto del plan piloto, fui enriqueciendo mis conocimientos, fui abriendo los ojos y el conocimiento a formas nuevas y muy dinámicas de dar clases, y lo atractivo de este proyecto es que se puede aplicar tanto a niños como adultos.

Al inicio fue difícil, pero poco a poco con el apoyo profesional de Marta y de mis compañeras alfabetizadoras, tomé el rumbo y se me hizo un poco fácil. Me siento muy feliz y agradecida con Dios por ponerme en mi camino a personas maravillosas y que siempre llevaré en mis oraciones. Al final logré culminar con este proyecto. Me hubiese gustado terminar con el grupo que inicié, pero no se pudo, pues el poco interés de algunas de las participantes hizo que se retiraran 4 integrantes y en verdad que necesitaban aprender. Pero me alegro por las que no se quedaron conformes y siguieron hasta el final.

Al tratar con personas con tanto conocimiento y experiencia como lo fueron mis participantes, aprendí a ser paciente, tolerante, saber escuchar, saber a hablar pues yo era más reservada y apenada pero al compartir con las señoras me ayudó a cambiar: mi carácter, mi manera de expresarme y tomar conciencia de lo que pasa en mi comunidad, a ser más consciente, a no sentir vergüenza a expresar mis pensamientos pues motivé a las participantes a que no tuvieran vergüenza como no ponerme ese reto a mí misma.

## Appendix 11: Selections from Booklet of Student Writing

### CONTAMOS NUESTRAS VIDAS

Mi niñez fue triste porque mis padres se separaron por motivos de problemas de matrimonios. Por ese motivo yo no estudié. Luego trabajaba con mi mamá. Entonces íbamos de un lugar a otro y por eso conozco muchos lugares.

Cuando tenía como 12 años me fui a trabajar a la capital. Al pasar el tiempo también trabajé en una fábrica de ropa. Vivía feliz pero luego me acordé de mi mamá y fui a buscarla. Ella vivía en la costa, en Colomba.







Después de visitar a mi mamá, tiempo después me casé. Ahora tengo siete hijas, un trabajo y estudio.

## Nuestros Pensamientos



Esta actividad es parte de la primera unidad. Aquí las participantes expresaron algo importante por medio de una palabra y un dibujo. Más adelante empezaron a formar sus primeras oraciones.

## NUESTROS PENSAMIENTOS

	En el jardín hay flores muy lindas.
	Que linda es la naturaleza.
	Los niños se alimentan sanamente.
	Nuestra mente florece.
	Jesús es muy importante para mi vida y mi familia.
	Qué bonito es el paisaje.
	Mi casa es muy importante porque es el lugar donde vivo.
	Mi familia es la base de la sociedad.
	Qué triste es que las personas talan los árboles.

# Nuestras Familias

En mi familia somos 7. Nos gusta compartir con los demás.  
Somos una familia muy feliz y vivimos unidos.  
A todos nos gusta participar en la iglesia y convivir con los demás miembros de la iglesia.

Tengo familia en Todos Santos. Solo yo vivo aquí en Xela y tengo una nena. Ella tiene 4 meses. Yo la tuve a los quince años. Vaya que está creciendo mi nena. Yo la cuido para que crezca bien.

Yo soy de Todos Santos y ahora vivo aquí con mis 11 hermanos, 4 hombres y 7 mujeres. Trabajo aquí. En Todos Santos solo se quedó un mi hermano para cuidar la casa.

En mi familia somos 4. Mi esposo es un padre amoroso que ama mucho a su familia y trabaja para alimentarlos y para que tengan lo necesario. Así nuestros hijos siguen estudiando para poder ganar una carrera. Así somos en nuestra familia. Nos gusta compartir con los demás.



Las comidas son muy deliciosas y se cocinan para cada fecha importante del año.



	<p><b>Semana Santa</b> En semana santa lo que se prepara es el pan y el pescado.</p>
	<p><b>Pepián</b> El pepián se prepara para fiestas, bodas, cumpleaños etc.</p>
	<p><b>Elotes</b> Los elotes se disfrutan para el mes de la independencia, mes de septiembre.</p>
	<p><b>Fiambre</b> El fiambre se prepara el primero de noviembre, día de los muertos.</p>

## RECETARIO DE MEDICINAS NATURALES

Las participantes en nuestro grupo compartieron sus conocimientos sobre las plantas medicinales y de allí escribimos estas recetas.

### ENELDO



Para desinfectar heridas.

Preparación:

Hervir de 3 a 5 minutos dos cucharaditas de hojas y tallo en 3 tazas de agua. Colocar y empapar un paño limpio y colocarlo en el área afectada.

### TAMARINDO



Para la diabetes.

Preparación:

Se machaca las semillas del tamarindo y hervir en un litro de agua durante 5 minutos. Tomar 3 vasos al día.

### PERICÓN



Para dolor de estómago, diarrea y nauseas.

Preparación.

Hervir un vaso de agua y dejar caer unas hojitas de pericón, de forma apagada.

## LA HISTORIA DE NUESTRA COMUNIDAD

Hace mucho tiempo en nuestra comunidad no había luz. Lo que se usaba era candela. Con eso podíamos tener iluminación en nuestras casas.

No había agua. De un pozo teníamos que ir a sacar. Solo así tendríamos. De lo contrario no se tenía agua.

No había molino para poder moler nixtamal, se usaba la piedra para moler. Existía un solo molino pero quedaba retirado. Estaba hasta en un lugar llamado el Tinajón, pero la mayoría de personas casi no lo buscaban, por ser muy retirado.

No habían tiendas cercas, quedaban muy retiradas.

No había carreteras, solo eran veredas y no habían buses para que las personas se transportaran, solo se caminaba a pie.

A través del tiempo empezó a trabajar un bus. Pero les quedaba muy retirada la parada. La parada era hasta donde está el hospital.

No había escuela y por eso había mucha gente que no estudiaba. Eran muy pocas las personas que estudiaban. Había una sola escuela, pero que les quedaba muy retirada.

Las personas que no estudiaban eran las que más se dedicaban a trabajar en el campo, en su mayoría eran jóvenes y señoritas. Por esa razón no estudiaban.

## **Appendix 12: Interview Schedules**

### **Interviews with ALFs, June/July 2016**

1. How did you become an adult literacy facilitator? What attracted you to this work?
2. What previous experience do you have that you were able to draw on for this work?
3. Why did you decide to join the pilot literacy project?
4. What were your expectations of the project?
5. Did it work out how you expected?
6. Can you give me any examples of activities that you thought worked well and helped people to learn?
7. How did it feel being part of the group of ALFs working on the pilot programme?
8. What have you learned from participating in the project?
9. What did you think about the workshops?
10. What about the visits to your group?
11. Any recommendations for the work of the trainer?

### **Interviews with ALFs, October/November 2016**

1. How do you feel now that the project is finished?
2. What is the most important thing that you have learned through the process?
3. Tell me what went well for you?
4. What changes have you made in the way that you work?
5. In what ways would you like to further develop your practice?
6. Who outside CONALFA has supported you in your work?
7. Are you planning to continue next year? If no, why not?
8. If you continue how would you use what you have learned this year?
9. What aspects of the pilot programme would you like to share with other ALFs?
10. What recommendations would you like to make for CONALFA?



**Interview with MLC, July 2016**

1. How do you think the project has developed from when we first conceived the idea last year to where we are now?
2. You told me that you had not been able to get as involved in the pilot project as you would have liked to because of your workload and the demands made on you by the departmental office. If you had the time, what would you have liked to do?
3. What do you think we have achieved? What changes have you seen?
4. How could we have improved our work? Our collaboration?
5. If you became departmental literacy co-ordinator, what would your priorities be?
6. What have you learned from the process of the pilot project?
7. When visiting literacy groups, what differences do you see between the pilot groups and the other groups?
8. Do you think it would be possible for a municipal co-ordinator, with all the work they have to do, to introduce this methodology alongside their other work?
9. Is it possible that the knowledge developed by the ALFs who worked on the pilot project can be extended in any way in the municipality? Is there a way of utilising their potential?

## Appendix 13: Selections from Interviews with Literacy Group Participants

### Extract from interview with Doña Aurora

Marta	Entonces primero quería saber ¿porque Ud. no tuvo la oportunidad de estudiar cuando era niña? ¿O sí estudio algo?
Aurora	Si estuvo en primaria y mis padres son de escasos recursos. Mi madre tenía niños pequeños y entonces ella no hay quien la apoyaba. Y entonces me fue a inscribir en la escuela y me mandaron un cuaderno y la maestra no me recibió con cuaderno porque tiene que ser completas en los cuadernos y ellos no tenían la economía. Porque en aquellos tiempos no había trabajo en esta comunidad para los hombres. Nada había. Ellos iban a hacer la leña en la montaña y las mujeres solo iban a vender en la cabeza. Y ellas están embarazadas y un bebe en la espalda y entonces no había nada economía.
Marta	Entonces ¿sus papás no tenían su propio terreno?
Aurora	No tenían sus propios terrenos. Y entonces cuando fueron creciendo mis hermanitos, entonces nosotros nos dedicábamos para ir a vender la leña. Pero era para el maíz solo para un día. Solo para un día. Y entonces e... es mucha la escasez que se podría decir.
Marta	Cuando dice solo para un día, dice que con una carga de leña ganaban solo para un día de maíz.
Aurora	Solo para un día.
Marta	Y entonces Ud. era una de las mayores de los hijos.
Aurora	Si. Yo soy la segunda y ahora estoy como la mayor pero es por el respeto y por también por apoyamos los más pequeños.
Marta	Entonces ¿Ud. siempre tenía esa responsabilidad de cuidar a los hermanos pequeños?
Aurora	A los demás. Mi mamá descansa en paz. Mi difunta mamá es una mujer trabajadora. Ella va a hacer la leña en la montaña, donde está la torre.
Marta	No conozco
Aurora	Si la torre siete (...) No se mira de aquí. No se mira la torre. Esta aquí detrás de este monte. Vaya entonces, ellos van a ir a hacer la leña. Y mi papá entro a trabajar en la municipalidad
Marta	A bien!
Aurora	Con el gobierno y su primer trabajo mi papá quedó allí en el... en el gobierno (...) a hachar la leña con el hacha. Van a ir a botar los arboles trozos grandes, lo carreen y el camión de la muni lo va a ir a recoger para estrazar los toros para quemar fuego, se foga (...) Y para estrazar los animales y la carne la vendían en el mercado. Entonces mi papá solo iba a vender... va a ir a botar el árbol pero es enviado por la muni.
Marta	Pero ¿fue un trabajo ya fijo?
Aurora	Fue un trabajo ya fijo.
Marta	Entonces ya ¿su situación mejoró un poco allí?
Aurora	Mejóro un poco allí. Mejoro un poco allí pero no era grande el sueldo. Eran como 15 quetzales (...) Pero ya es una ayuda para mi mamá. Pero como éramos bastantes niños y entonces no alcanzaba el dinero... el dinero, aunque la mujer quiere trabajar, pero no había trabajo.
Marta	Si.
Aurora	No había trabajo. El hombre también quiere trabajar, pero no hay trabajo. No hay trabajo. Ahora si hay trabajo.

Marta	Y ahora ¿qué trabajos hay?
Aurora	Ahora ya hay... por ejemplo ya hay ayudantes de albañil, y hay que picar la tierra con las personas que tienen terreno grande. Pagan el día así a Q50. Pero ya hay trabajo. Antes no había.
Marta	Y en ese tiempo cuando Ud. era niña, vivía... ¿nació aquí?
Aurora	Si. Aquí.
Marta	Y entonces ¿todavía era mucho más pequeño el pueblo?
Aurora	Si. Era más pequeño. Aquí en frente de donde está la iglesia católica en frente allí se sembraba trigo... trigo y antes de navidad cosechan el trigo y se queda la paja... la paja... y la paja es para hacer fogata en la navidad y hay quienes lo echan bajo del colchón de maíz. Aja. Eso es lo que había en ese tiempo.
Marta	Bien. Y yo vi en una de las ocasiones que yo estuve aquí yo vi que Ud. tiene muchos conocimientos acerca de su comunidad
Aurora	Si.
Marta	Y quería saber de donde aprendió tantas cosas de su comunidad
Aurora	¿De dónde aprendí?
Marta	Si.
Aurora	A... es que yo tuve una abuela, pero como lo podría decir yo? Yo soy la bisnieta
Marta	A... bisabuela pues.
Aurora	Bisabuela ¿verdad?
Marta	Entonces ¿la abuela de su papá o de su mamá?
Aurora	La abuela de mi mamá. Ella es comadrona de esta comunidad. La primera comadrona en todo el país, ella salía a ver el parto de las mujeres. Y ella me contaba todas las historias. Me decía que a guardarle en tu mente, te va a servir algún día. Y aunque no sabes a leer, pero te va a servir. Ella no sabe leer también, pero si sabe y me explicaba.

### Extract from Interview with Doña Laura

Marta	Entonces Doña Lucia, le voy a hacer algunas preguntas parecidas a las que pregunté a Doña Irma y algunas un poco diferentes. Pero primero quería saber... ¿Ud. no tuvo la oportunidad de estudiar cuando era niña?
Laura	No. Yo nunca estudié.
Marta	Y ¿por qué fue?
Laura	porque antes nos decían nuestros papas, nuestras mamás que eso no es necesario estudiar a las mujeres. Solo los varones tienen derecho de estudiar, pero las mujeres no. Entonces nos dicen que Uds. las mujeres ¿para qué? Si Uds. algún día se casan, se van con los maridos, no les va a servir para nada el estudio, nos dicen, bueno como uno es dejado ¿verdad? uno no conoce nada, no sabe nada y como antes hay más respeto, entonces nosotros respetamos...
Marta	¿A sus padres?
Laura	Aja. Todos nosotros respetamos a nuestro papá, a nuestra mamá. Nos quedamos callados. No dirigimos ni una palabra. Entonces así se quedó. Y lo demás, nosotros... yo por mi parte pues, yo no nací aquí. No que yo nací en Ch. Ch – allá nací. Entonces yo tenía como por ahí... como 14 o 13 años. Mis abuelitos... murió mi abuelita y se quedó mi abuelo. Entonces por eso nosotros bajamos venir a mantener a él... nos bajamos de aquí pero ya... ya somos grandes, ya no nos pusieron en la escuela, ya nunca nos pusieron

Marta	Y allí en Ch ¿no había escuela?
Laura	No. No hay escuela. Ahora ya hay, pero antes no hay. A mis hermanos que es un mi hermano más el mayor que a mí, eso es lo que fue a estudiar en Chx. Allí hay escuela. Si, pero nosotras de mujer no estudiamos. Somos 2 con otra mi hermana, pero mi hermana ya ha fallecido. Entonces... nunca nos ponemos. Nunca nos pusieron en la escuela. Entonces ya nunca.
Marta	Pero sus hermanos ¿todos estudiaron?
Laura	Ellos sí.
Marta	Y ¿terminaron primaria?
Laura	No todos terminaron primaria. No. No todos. Uno, los más grandes no terminaron primaria. Los otros que si ya, los más pequeños si terminaron sus primaria. Mis hermanas mujeres, tengo dos hermanas, una se quedó en tercero, una se quedó en cuarto. Allí quedaron. En primaria
Marta	Y ¿para qué les servía a los hombres estudiar?
Laura	Porque los papás decían que solo ellos saben... solo ellos pueden estudiar porque le necesitan... las letras y escribir. En cambio las mujeres no. Aja
Marta	Y en ese tiempo, dígame Ud. cuando era niña ¿hablaba español o solo hablaba k'iche?
Laura	Solo k'iche.
Marta	Y sus hermanos aprendieron estudiando en la escuela
Laura	Ellos sí. Por eso yo no puedo mucho pronunciar las palabras porque yo no me estuve en la escuela. Yo no... más que todo más hablaba yo en k'iche.
Marta	Y ¿cuándo aprendió hablar español?
Laura	Cuando ya son grandes mis hermanos los pequeños, que esos hablan español.
Marta	Entonces ¿Ud. aprendió con sus hermanos?
Laura	Si pues.
Marta	Pero nunca fue a estudiar el español ni nada.
Laura	No...
Marta	¿Lo aprendió así de oído?
Laura	Si, aja. Por eso yo no sé estudiar más. Eso si necesito. Si. Yo nunca estudié. Si.
Marta	Pero cuando era niña ¿quería estudiar?
Laura	Quería estudiar. Pero no... no... dicen que no. ¿Para qué? Nos dicen.
Marta	Y ¿algunas otras muchachas de su comunidad iban a estudiar?
Laura	Si hay unas que estudiaron, unos que no, unas que sí. Que los papás las pusieran en las hijas. Pero uno no.
Marta	Y ¿cómo se sentía Ud. Entonces?
Laura	Me sentía un poco mal porque yo quería estudiar. Yo quería leer, yo quería escribir. Pondríamos: uno va a la iglesia. Uno quiere ver que los demás miran sus biblias, van a la lectura de la biblia y uno nada, solo así se está uno, solo escuchón. Si. Eso es me quedó. Pues uno lo necesita pues. Pero ya es muy tarde para uno. Aja. Ya es muy tarde para uno.
Marta	Pero ¿se sintió así dejada? ¿Que no le dieron la oportunidad?
Laura	Yo la verdad, digo yo entre mi a veces les decía yo a mis hermanos: lástima que... yo así les dije... lástima que mi padre no me puso a la escuela, digo yo. Nada sé. Nada conozco. Pues si me manden hasta la acera en tal parte en las calles, saber en qué... en que nombre, en que calle. Si.

**Extract from interview with Doña Erlinda**

Marta	Cuando Ud. se juntó al grupo de Andrea, Ud. Ya sabía algo de leer y escribir, ¿verdad? Entonces quería que me contara donde aprendió lo que ya sabía.
Erlinda	Fíjese que cuando llegué a CONALFA, no sabía tanto, pues, de... Yo estudié párvulos de primaria y solo saqué primero nada mas de primaria. Solo aprendí mi nombre y todo y ya no seguí estudiando porque más que todo mi mamá no tenía posibilidad de darnos más estudio. Pero en eso que apareció Andrea, hay una oportunidad pues de aprender más de lo que sabemos un poco. Allí con Andrea aprendí lo que es... como la minúscula, mayúscula, todo eso como se escribe ¿verdad? Y fuimos aprendiendo un poco con ella y gracias a Dios allí estamos, aprendiendo.
Marta	Entonces ¿cómo se decidió apuntarse al grupo?
Erlinda	Porque Andrea llegó en casa y me fue a comentar que va a haber un grupo con ella en su casa para aprender de lo que se había... o sea lo que ella había dicho que iba a dar enseñanza a un grupo de mujeres. Entonces yo me decidí a ingresar a ese grupo para aprender más de lo que...
Marta	Muy bien, entonces... cuénteme lo de ¿cómo se llama? ¿Comisión de Salud?
Erlinda	E sí. Comisión de salud estamos en el grupo de comisión de salud por lo que allí del alcalde nos eligió para ir a apoyar a las mujeres embarazadas, a las mujeres que están enfermas porque realmente lo de salud no... no tiene la posibilidad de ir casa en casa...
Marta	Y ¿cómo es que Ud. se integró a la comisión?
Erlinda	E por medio del alcalde y por medio de los del centro de salud. Porque no hay mucho personaje como del gobierno ahora, no, no apoya ya tanto la de salud. Entonces nosotros somos 10 personas, integramos a la de salud para ver que necesidades tiene las personas en sus casas. Entonces nosotros en el grupo nos apoyamos. Cuando hay una emergencia así como la mujer está embarazada y llega el momento de que se compone entonces nosotros lo que hacemos es entre todos juntamos un poco dinero como por decir, un grano de arena. Damos a todo, aportamos y pagamos un taxi y lo llevamos y así es el apoyo que nosotros damos para la comunidad (...)
Marta	Y ¿cómo se siente Ud. haciendo ese trabajo?
Erlinda	Pues fíjese que me siento muy bien porque allí aprendemos muchas cosas lo que uno no sabe, nos enseña y aprendemos y aparte de eso, algo entre la familia como por ejemplo cuando los niños están comiendo se empieza a ahogarse, entonces ya nos enseñaron cual es el primer auxilio. Entonces eso tenemos que saber y cualquier cosa pues yo me siento bien por lo que ya aprendí con ellos también.
Marta	Muy bien y ¿cómo le ha ido con el grupo de Andrea? ¿Con el grupo de Uds.?
Erlinda	E bien. O sea, allí está organizado como que llegan a aprender y se divierte mucho uno aprendiendo todo lo que Andrea nos ha enseñado como parte de Ud. también que nos ha apoyado también.
Marta	Muy bien y... Entonces cuéntame ¿Qué es lo que considera que ha ganado participando en el grupo de alfabetización este año?
Erlinda	Pues he lo visto de lo que hemos ganado allí es aprender. Y tener otras amistades y aprender muchas cosas de la vida... Por lo mismo que sabemos un poco para enseñar a nuestros hijos también lo que... lo que

	ya nos enseñaron. Entonces apoyarlos a ellos que estudien a que no queden igual como nosotros pues que no tenemos esa oportunidad de estudiar. Pero ahora ellos pues tienen oportunidad, entonces nosotros vamos a apoyar a nuestros hijos como a otras personas también que no sepan leer ni escribir, entonces nosotros tenemos la oportunidad de enseñarlo también lo que las maestras ya nos enseñaron a nosotras.
Marta	Y ¿piensas seguir para el próximo año?
Erlinda	Pues si hay una oportunidad, sí. Si hay una oportunidad, allí estamos, apoyando también.

## **Appendix 14: Quotes from Latin American Writers on Literacy**

### **REFLEXIONES SOBRE LA ALFABETIZACIÓN**

La educación de adultos es importante por muchas razones, pero las fundamentales y obvias radican en que las personas adultas son las que trabajan, las que son responsables del crecimiento de sus hijos, las que pueden apoyar a los niños y jóvenes en su desarrollo, las que tienen una experiencia de vida rescatable para la educación de las nuevas generaciones y las que, por todo eso, merecen contar con lo necesario para disfrutar de una vida digna, enriquecida culturalmente y con los conocimientos que les permitan desarrollar un trabajo edificante (Rosas, 2005, p.110) (Prologo al libro de Carmen Campero)

El adulto iletrado no es ignorante; sabe muchas cosas y desconoce otras. La vida ha sido su maestro; ha acumulado conocimientos y experiencias (Lunagomez, 2007, p.26).

A lo largo de una vida de limitaciones en que casi nunca conoció el "éxito" ha desarrollado un sentimiento de incapacidad para hacer y aprender cosas, reflejo de la falta de confianza en sí mismo y como resultado de la carencia de oportunidades para demostrar que es capaz de desarrollar sus habilidades y adquirir conocimientos (Lunagómez, 2007, p.25)

Las personas requieren del impulso para empezar por sí mismas a aprender, sin hacerlas sentir dependientes (Verdugo & Raymundo, 2009 p.189).

Tanto los niños como los adultos son poseedores de conocimientos e ideas de las cuales deben partir los procesos formativos. No debe imponerse la manera de pensar y actuar de los educadores. Los estudiantes no deben ser vistos como objetos sino como sujetos de aprendizaje con un potencial muy grande (Verdugo & Raymundo, 2009 p.190)

La rigidez metodológica debe sustituirse por métodos que en sí mismos planteen la posibilidad de adaptarse a las demandas específicas de la población a alfabetizar y de innovar continuamente sus formas de aplicación (Verdugo & Raymundo, 2009 p.191).

Los animadores, promotores o facilitadores de la alfabetización deben ser formados y sensibilizados para convertirse en servidores de la comunidad y así poder responder a los intereses de la población (Verdugo & Raymundo, 2009 p.191)